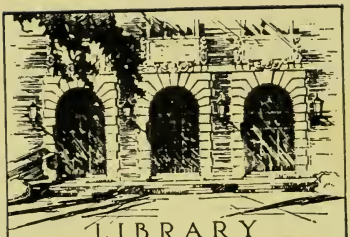

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MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES.

VOL. I.

MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES

BY

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"CLAUDE," "HELEN'S FIRST LOVE,"
"THE HISTORY OF A HEART,"
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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MRS. GREY'S REMINISCENCES.

INTRODUCTION.

MY own life has been a very uneventful one as regards outward circumstances, but it has afforded me many opportunities of noting the lives of others whose destinies have been more chequered than my own. Some of these experiences I have recorded in the following pages, as they came personally to my knowledge, or have been related to me by the principal actors in the scenes I have faithfully endeavoured to pourtray. I may as well premise that my sketches are entirely confined to the inhabitants of the large old country town in

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which my own life has been for the most part passed.

I have had, as I have already observed, peculiar facilities for becoming acquainted with the miniature world around me; first as the daughter of the Rector of the principal church in Castleford, and afterwards as the wife—and now, alas! the widow—of a much esteemed physician of the same place.

Having no family of my own—my only child having died in infancy—my sympathies have been more particularly drawn out by and centred in those around me. Thus it has occurred to me that, with so many recollections of interest regarding others, I might find a fitting occupation (not always unmixed with pain) in committing some of these reminiscences to paper.

BASIL'S BRIDE.

BASIL'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

IT is very many years now since I remember young Basil Egerton taking his place in Mr. Nesbit's counting-house. Everyone considered it was rather beneath one of the Egerton family to occupy that position, but the act of so doing really showed a more independent spirit in the young man than had he been satisfied to starve in idleness, or lead the humiliating existence of a hanger-on at his rich uncle's fine place, not far distant from Castleford.

His father was a younger brother of the reigning Squire, who had several sons and one daughter of his own, so that he could not

afford (although reputed rich) to do much for his brother's family. Basil's father was the "ne'er-do-weel" of the Egertons. He had been in the Army, and had since managed to get a commission for his eldest son Richard. But Dick Egerton was too much his father's own son to get on in any profession, and, it may be briefly stated here, died early, after a very extravagant and by no means creditable career.

Basil, in the meantime, soon after his father's death, had applied for a vacant stool in Mr. Nesbit's counting-house, and had been accepted, more out of favour than with much expectation of finding in the young man a valuable acquisition to the office. However, after a little hesitation, Mr. Nesbit installed him in the desired situation.

Basil had, with his brother, been brought up at a public school—Westminster, I think, and after his career there was finished, he joined his father on the Continent,

but Mr. Egerton dying soon after, he was left without any resources, and returning to England, had been in some degree hanging on at his uncle's till something might turn up in his favour.

Perhaps the sense of dependence had become galling to the young man, as he saw others of the same age entering into busy life, and himself condemned by his poverty and position, as it were, to remain idle.

A casual observation he overheard one day induced him to offer himself, as I have said, for the situation he afterwards held; but I think he accepted it more as a stepping-stone to something better, and to learn the regular routine of business, than with any fixed intention of remaining in it.

At that time Basil Egerton was about two and twenty, a tall, fine-looking young man, with good features, an intelligent countenance, and pleasing address.

Mr. Nesbit was a self-made man, and a

very fair specimen of his class, prejudiced in many respects, but honest and liberal in his transactions. He was considered rich himself, and had a great respect for wealth in others, with a slight contempt for those who were better born, but familiar with the ills of poverty. He had been good-looking in his day, but became somewhat coarse and heavy in appearance as an elderly man, though in his youth, when tall, fair, and florid, he had successfully wooed and won the hand of a young and pretty woman, the orphan daughter of a clergyman in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Nesbit, however, died early, leaving one only daughter to console her husband for her loss, and on this child the wealthy man lavished all the affection of which his nature was capable.

Agnes Nesbit was one of those happy natures which seem to escape the penalty generally entailed on a life of over-indulgence. She grew up extremely pretty, and seemed to have had a fairy godmother to

endow her with all good things besides. I knew Agnes Nesbit very well at one time, for we were together at the Miss Primroses' "Establishment for Young Ladies," and being nearly the same age, and living in the same town, we constantly met.

Mr. Nesbit was devoted to his daughter, and when she came to live entirely at home, thought she would be happier with a companion of her own age, and preferred this arrangement on his own account, to that of having an older woman constantly associated with them in their domestic life. Mr. Nesbit's early training and position in life induced him to dispense with such an encumbrance as he would have found in an elderly chaperon for his daughter. The continual presence of such a person would have been a *gêne* to him, and he did not imagine it was at all essential to her future success in the world, so he only consulted his own, as well as Agnes's inclinations on the subject. These

both inclined to an orphan niece of his own, at least, she had only one parent living, and that was a mother, who had married again a dissenting minister, and consequently, he supposed, could very well spare her daughter to go and live with her cousin.

It proved so, for Fanny Nesbit came and took up her abode in Mr. Nesbit's large house in the market-place, and, I imagine, found it a very pleasant change from the little crowded one where her mother and step-father lived, surrounded by a large family of small children. Fanny was too delighted to escape the dull routine of the minister's home to be able to reciprocate her mother's regrets on their separation. Mr. Nesbit's offer was far too favourable to Fanny's interests as well as inclinations, to be for a moment the subject of hesitation on the part either of mother or daughter. Mr. Nesbit generously offered a future as well as present provision for his niece, and as Fanny had often visited her

cousin Agnes, she felt sure she could be as happy with her as her heart could desire. Besides, Fanny Nesbit was by no means indifferent to all the circumstances of ease and luxury by which she knew she should be surrounded in her uncle's house.

I had occasionally seen Agnes's cousin when staying in Castleford, but did not know her intimately. The two girls resembled each other in person, each taking after her own father, being tall and fair, and well-looking altogether; but there the resemblance ended, for there was little similarity in the dispositions of the cousins. Fanny had a certain amount of quickness, which passed for cleverness, and a plausibility of manner that generally gained her friends, but there was a littleness and cunning in Fanny Nesbit's mental constitution which had probably been induced by the sort of life she had been leading before she came to her uncle's house.

Fanny hated the strictness of her step-father's views and habits, but she had been forced to accommodate her own to those inculcated by precept and example in Mr. Taylor's home, though so distasteful to herself.

Her mother was a weak woman, whilst Fanny had a very strong will of her own, with a clear view to her own interest, and this latter sentiment seemed to influence the former to a great extent. Fanny could stoop to fawn and flatter if it suited her purpose, and she could also carry things with a high hand, when she found she could conveniently do so.

When she arrived at Castleford she expressed herself full of gratitude for the happy home, and all the comforts and luxuries provided for her there; whilst Agnes was, on her part, only too delighted to heap every indulgence that her generous heart could devise upon her less fortunate cousin.

Fanny, secure in the ample allowance

promised by her uncle, made a merit of declining some of the many gifts that Agnes would have lavished on her. Being nearly of the same height and size, Agnes would have equipped Fanny at once from her own handsome and abundant wardrobe, but Fanny made a show of disinterestedness on the occasion, and refused many of these generous offerings. The inmost purpose of her heart was answered when, a few days after her arrival, her uncle placed a cheque for a very liberal sum in her hand, desiring Fanny to buy everything she would require in her new position, which, Mr. Nesbit observed, would necessitate a much more extensive choice of habiliments than she had required whilst living in the dissenting minister's family.

Fanny's expressions of acquiescence and gratitude were couched in the most appropriate language her busy brain could suggest, and Mr. Nesbit was much pleased with the new inmate of his house, of whom

he had formerly seen but little, and taken less notice.

Thus the two girls settled down, perfectly happy and contented with each other. Fanny meanwhile had masters for such lessons as she thought would further her advancement in life; her education had been conducted on a very limited scale, and of accomplishments she was entirely ignorant.

"For what," said Mr. Taylor, "had a Christian young woman to do with such light recreations as music and dancing? As for the first, if she had any voice or ear, let her sing hymns in the chapel, and she would require no master to teach her how to do that; and as for the latter, it was an abomination that need not be mentioned."

So Fanny came to her uncle's house quite innocent, and altogether ignorant in respect to these matters. Agnes, however, soon took care to provide her cousin with the means of acquiring instruction in both, and Fanny, with a quick ear,

ready comprehension, and diligent practice, made considerable advance, in the course of a year, both in music and dancing, Agnes aiding her cousin between her lessons in every possible way, by supplementing the master's instructions.

Thus things went on for a year or two, and Mr. Nesbit rejoiced in his heart that he had managed matters so well, both to give his daughter a suitable and pleasant companion, and also to benefit the child of the brother to whom in life he had been so much attached. Fanny was, to all appearance, very amiable and grateful to her uncle and cousin for all the benefits they conferred upon her.

It was in the second year of her domestication in her uncle's family that Basil Egerton made his first appearance in the merchant's family. It had been arranged that he should live in Mr. Nesbit's house, and the good man was not at all displeased at the proposition, and readily seconded

the wish of Basil's uncle (Mr. Egerton). So Basil came and took up his abode as one of the family.

When he first arrived it so happened that Agnes was absent, visiting a school-fellow, and Fanny had been left alone to cheer her uncle whilst she was away. Fanny had then an opportunity, of which she made the most, of improving the acquaintance of the new-comer. The two young people were thrown much together after the business hours of the day were over. Fanny had an aspiring mind, and courted social distinction. It became, therefore, the great end and aim of her ambition to captivate the young man thus thrown, as it were, amongst them for that especial purpose.

How far she succeeded I am unable to tell. But from all I have since seen and heard, I imagine that in playing with edged tools she cut her own fingers, and became hopelessly in love with Basil Egerton.

Young as he was at that time, he had seen a good deal of society both abroad and at his uncle's house, and plenty of pretty girls in his own grade of society, so possibly, though Fanny Nesbit was decidedly good-looking, she might have been wanting in something which Basil considered essential to beauty. No doubt, having lived all her life in the narrow circle of the dissenting minister's clique, Fanny Nesbit was entirely wanting in style, and that well-bred ease of manner to which the young man had been accustomed. He, however, met her advances to acquaintance with perfect good-nature, and finding her established in his present home, possibly considered her (though under-bred, and wanting in many respects) better worth talking to than the elderly merchant, with his precise ideas and business habits, or than any of the pert and narrow-minded young men, his fellow-clerks. So perhaps Fanny may be excused if, in the height of her infatuation,

she believed that the feeling of which she was but too conscious, in regard to Basil Egerton, was duly reciprocated by him.

CHAPTER II.

THUS two or three weeks passed quickly away, and Fanny believed she had made considerable progress in the young man's affections. She sought, too, to enlist his sympathy and interest by representing herself as alone in the world, and thrown upon the charity of her relations, who, prosperous and happy themselves, could not understand or enter into her feelings.

No doubt it was in allusion to these remarks and insinuations on the part of Fanny that Basil Egerton one day asked me—then a girl, and a friend of the family—whether Miss Agnes Nesbit was not

rather a self-sufficient and purse-proud sort of young lady?

My astonishment could only find vent in words expressive of utter bewilderment as to who could ever have put such an idea into his head. Never dreaming that it could be the petted, pampered Fanny, who was so greatly indebted to her sweet cousin. The young man surveyed me with a keen eye, and then laughed as he replied—

"Oh! no one ever told me as much; I only inferred something of the kind from various things I have heard."

"Then," replied I, in youthful indignation, "if you chose to listen to such hateful and unfounded stories, I shall not contradict them, but wait till you have *seen* Agnes, and then hear your opinion."

That time came very shortly afterwards. Agnes returned home, and Basil had the desired opportunity of judging for himself.

And now I shall relate things as I afterwards gathered them, and not, perhaps, as

they occurred to my knowledge at the time.

When Agnes arrived, Fanny made a show of great delight, though her heart was filled with secret misgiving, and she watched eagerly to see whether her new friend continued firm in his supposed allegiance to herself, after the advent of her prettier and more prosperous cousin. She made a show of retiring, as if she felt herself to be quite superseded in every way as soon as Agnes came home.

The morning after her arrival, however, Fanny hurried down to meet Basil in the breakfast-room before Agnes had appeared, her ostensible object being to make the tea before her uncle was ready for breakfast. This post had been conferred upon her soon after her arrival, as she was more used to early hours, and could therefore be better depended upon than Agnes, who was rather dilatory in her habits. Fanny glanced with much satisfaction at Basil,

who was already in the room, looking over the newspaper.

He nodded to her, as was his custom, just observing,

"Early as usual, Miss Fanny."

"Ah, yes," responded the young lady, with a little deprecating smile. "This is my post, and, well or ill, I am always expected to be down at a certain hour; but, of course, it is quite right, and the proper place for a dependant."

"Well, happily there is no great hardship in making tea every morning." And then he added, unwarily—"I am sure I shall expect my wife to do as much for me, early or late, as may be."

Fanny felt as if this was half-way to a proposal, so only simpered and replied:

"I daresay your wife will be very pleased to do so for you every morning, and every evening too, if you require it."

Basil's thoughts had, however, drifted away from the tea-making subject, and

reverted to the implied hardship, and the innocent cause of it, saying,

"So that Miss Agnes puts it all upon you? But she does not look as if she could be very hard upon anyone, does she?"

To this query Fanny indirectly replied:

"I am sure, if she were so, I should be the last person to say so; but, you see, Agnes and I have been so differently brought up. In my case, I have always had to think of everybody before myself, whereas Agnes, being so rich, and an only child, has only had to consider her own wishes and fancies, and do whatever has been most pleasant to herself all her life."

"I should not think it has made her selfish, though, to judge by her looks," said the young man, to the evident discomfiture of his amiable companion, who only gave a short, impatient sigh, and returned to the tea-making business at the breakfast-

table, whilst Basil took up his newspaper, and continued its perusal.

Soon after that, Agnes came down, looking as bright as a sunbeam coming into the room, whilst her cousin's face clouded over as she saw the responsive brightness on the young man's face as he returned her cheerful morning greeting. Agnes's manners were particularly frank and kind; she had been accustomed to receive kindness all her life, and to please wherever she appeared. Such indulgence might have spoilt a less sweet-tempered, unselfish girl, for Fanny's ungenerous insinuations were as unfounded as they were designing. Perhaps she hardly realised the extent of her treachery and ingratitude. She did not wish to injure her cousin, but she had begun to consider that Basil Egerton was her lawful property, or, rather, that she had a prior claim upon his regard.

In her ill-regulated mind she had be-

stowed much more thought and interest upon him than his slight civilities towards her had warranted. In her ignorance of "men and manners," she had taken a few superficial compliments and commonplace attentions for something of a far more serious character. To marry at all was a great object with her, and one she was eager to attain, notwithstanding her uncle's kind intentions towards her, and her present state of ease and comfort. She longed for independence and a home of her own, where she might be *first* instead of *second* in every way. Besides that, she liked and admired Basil Egerton as far superior to any young man who had hitherto crossed her path in the way of acquaintance, and she longed to have a claim to enter that higher sphere of life and society to which he by every right belonged.

That he would eventually achieve success in any profession or employment to

which he chose to devote his energies, she never for one moment doubted; indeed, she had good authority for such a conviction, as she had heard her plain-spoken, practical uncle declare, after a close observation of his new clerk, that the young man had brains which would always help him, as long as he depended upon them instead of his fine friends, and was satisfied to stick close to his work.

Fanny wished heartily that Agnes had delayed her return home; she had fondly hoped to gain such decided influence over Basil before she appeared, that he might have been induced to say something which would have given her a sure hold over his future actions, and have entitled her to demand every attention from him as her own by right.

Fanny was by no means diffident as regarded her own claims to admiration, but she was dimly conscious that Agnes, although hardly better-born than herself,

was better-bred; that the ease and luxury in which she had been cradled had given her a certain advantage over herself, brought up in the narrowness and penury of her early home, deficient in everything that beautifies existence. She saw, too, that Agnes was sought in society by those who were her superiors in rank, and the rich merchant's only child was a welcome guest in many places to which she was never invited.

Fanny was well aware that she was only looked upon as the poor cousin, indebted to the charity and kindness of her uncle and cousin for every attention from others, as well as daily comforts at home. Unhappily, instead of these considerations making Fanny more amiable and grateful, they had rather the contrary effect of filling her heart with envy and spite, and other unpleasant sensations.

Well, Agnes was in the field at last, and, according to Fanny's supposition,

was trying to take her kingdom from her. So it behoved her to use every stratagem, which she considered was lawful in love as well as in war. Agnes, happily quite unconscious of all that was working against her in her cousin's mind, came between her and her intended lover, armed only with the weapons of her natural grace, and an indescribable sweetness of manner which gained the hearts of young and old alike.

Basil, on that first morning of Agnes's return, could not help reverting in his thoughts to the insinuations which had been thrown out against her by her cousin. He looked at the two girls, and compared them. They were undoubtedly very much alike, besides a strong family resemblance in voice, but there the likeness ceased. Fanny's manners were rather under-bred, artificial, and self-conscious, full of conceit and pretension, even when she dealt most largely in self-depreciation. What those of Agnes were I have already said—win-

ning, natural, and kind. Perhaps Fanny's features were really the handsomest, and she had what might have been called a finer figure. Agnes was as tall, but slenderer, with a more willow-like figure, and her complexion was much fairer. Altogether more loveable-looking in every way.

Now Basil was quite young in those days, and had thought but little of love, and not at all of matrimony; he was no doubt pleased to find two nice girls in his new home, and did not even contrast them in his mind with others he had seen in a different class of society in his uncle's house. He took them both as they were, as he became acquainted with each, never dreaming that the obvious attentions lavished on him by Fanny, when he first came, meant anything more than a kindly welcome to her uncle's house. He rather wondered at the sentiments she sometimes let fall as to her own unfortunate position in the world, and the hardship which she

suffered in being an inmate of her uncle's house. His first natural impression was, if he ever thought seriously on the subject, that it was her own fault if she could not make herself happy and comfortable where she was; but then he supposed girls were sometimes odd creatures, and had strange, unaccountable whims and fancies, and it might be Miss Fanny could not get on with her cousin, who perhaps was a little spoilt and overbearing, and probably her dependent situation made her feel things in a way that was never intended. Then he thought of his own former position as a hanger-on in *his* uncle's house. Only he remembered he had not made himself very uneasy on that head, though it had induced him to take the step of seeking the place he was then occupying.

"But of course," said he to himself, "a man can always work his own way in the world whilst he has two hands and a head, but it is different with girls."

So the matter rested in his mind until Agnes came home; and then he found that all his preconceived notions about her (gathered from her cousin's insinuations) were very much at fault.

The first evening of her return Agnes was tired; she had come a long journey, and she could not talk as unreservedly as usual about all her proceedings to her father and Fanny in the presence of an entire stranger, so she was rather more silent than usual; but there was no mistaking the sweet courtesy of her manner towards himself, and the endearing way in which, when she spoke, she addressed her father and her cousin. It was, therefore, with a slight feeling of incredulity the next morning that Basil listened to the covert remarks which Fanny Nesbit meant to be applicable to her cousin Agnes; if they were, he thought, looks were very deceitful, especially those of Agnes Nesbit. But when the girl came into the breakfast-room, his

thoughts speedily acquitted her of everything unamiable, or the possibility of showing unkindness to one so nearly related to her, and dependent on her for every enjoyment.

"Poor girl!" thought Basil of Fanny, "I fear it is her own crotchety temper that stands in her way, though really she has been very kind to me ever since I came."

Yes, and would have gladly been much kinder still, had not Basil's own blindness and preoccupation stood in the way. He had then no more thoughts of falling in love with the rich merchant's only daughter than he had with her penniless cousin; and Agnes, on her part, had as little design upon his heart, or fear of losing her own. She had mixed freely in society, and had no doubt been the avowed object both of love and admiration, but as yet she had escaped fancy free, still found all her happiness in her home, and was glad to remain her father's comfort and companion.

Nevertheless, it soon appeared that Agnes was ere long likely to be tempted to leave that pleasant shelter, and be wooed to find a still dearer companion elsewhere.

It happened that, whilst Agnes was on her distant visit to her old school friends, another guest came at the same time to stay there, and remained nearly all the time of Agnes's visit. This gentleman was a Mr. Vavasour, a distant relation of the family with whom she was staying. He was many years older than herself, but still young and good-looking enough to take a girl's fancy, if her heart was disengaged. He was at the time on leave from India, where he occupied a high civil post, and as in those days such situations were far more lucrative than they are at present, Mr. Vavasour was undoubtedly a rich man, as well as a fairly pleasant and gentlemanlike one. There had been no proposal made to Agnes during the time of her visit, but Mr. Vavasour's attentions

were sufficiently marked to show what his intentions were, especially when he told Agnes, just before she left her friend's house, that he did not consider their parting at all final, as he hoped to be staying in her neighbourhood in the course of a week or two, and should certainly find his way to Castleford, and trusted she would allow him to call and become acquainted with Mr. Nesbit.

When Agnes, the day after her return, with her usual frank candour, related this circumstance to her father, he knit his brow, but naturally asked,

"And what did you say to that, Agnes?"

"Why, papa, I had no right to keep him away, so, of course, I said we should be happy to see him."

CHAPTER III.

FANNY NESBIT'S mind was greatly relieved when Agnes made her little announcement; she fancied now her own way would be clear and prosperous. A real suitor coming for her cousin would remove every obstacle from her own path; for though she still fondly adhered to the flattering belief that Basil secretly preferred her to her cousin, yet he might be dazzled by the brilliant prospect of Agnes's future fortune.

When Agnes spoke of Mr. Vavasour's intended visit she was alone with her father and Fanny, and as the former left the room soon after the communication

was made, Fanny hastened to improve the opportunity by asking what manner of man was this same Mr. Vavasour, and by putting various other questions tending to evince her conviction that the said gentleman was coming as an open admirer and candidate for her cousin's hand.

To all these queries Agnes returned playful, half laughing rejoinders, but said nothing that could satisfy the persistent inquirer. Fanny, although so anxious to believe that Mr. Vavasour was coming to carry Agnes away, heard nothing from herself to confirm that hope and expectation. At last Fanny, baffled and anxious, exclaimed,

"But I should like to know, Agnes, what it really is, if it is not *you*, that brings this Mr. Vavasour to Castleford?"

"I can only tell you, Fanny, what he said—to call on papa."

"Very likely, indeed! If he had never

seen you, would he have wanted to come here to see uncle?"

"Very likely not," acquiesced Agnes.

"There, then you do own it at last. Well, I am glad of that."

"Glad of what, Fanny dear?"

"Oh! you provoking thing! You know. I mean I am glad that you are honest at last, and confess that your new friend is coming to see you."

"Well, and if he does, what of that? He will be staying in the neighbourhood, and surely it is nothing remarkable that, as we have been staying together in the same house for a month, and know all the same people, he should pay a visit here, and be introduced to papa."

And then Agnes, tired apparently of the subject, took up a book, and left the room, so that Fanny was obliged to devour her suspicions in silence.

I happened to be present two or three times on these occasions, and one day

when Fanny was more than usually pertinacious, Agnes turned away, for once almost impatient, saying,

"Really, Fanny, if you tease so about nothing, I must do something to stop your tongue."

Just then Basil came into the room, and Fanny turned eagerly to him with a flushed face, exclaiming,

"Oh! Mr. Egerton, I am so glad you are come. Agnes is so angry with me, and threatening all sorts of horrid things against poor me."

"And what has 'poor me' been saying or doing to deserve such chastisement?" asked the young man, drawing near to Agnes, and laughing.

"Oh! I must not tell, I daresay, but we shall know very soon, though Agnes need not be so cross about it," said Fanny, not at all in the tone of a subdued and depressed dependant.

Basil looked from one to the other, but

his eyes lingered longer on Agnes's fair face, and she, feeling the scrutiny she was undergoing, looked up quietly into the young man's face, and said, in reply,

"It is nothing very interesting to you to hear about, Mr. Egerton. Only an acquaintance I made where I was lately staying who is coming into this neighbourhood, and proposes to call here some day when in Castleford."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fanny, who was in an irrepressible state of mind—"Ah! but *who* is the acquaintance, and *what* is he coming for?"

Agnes coloured more from annoyance at her cousin's want of tact and ill-breeding than from any personal interest she might feel in the matter, and that was so evident, both to Basil and myself, that by our united efforts we contrived to stem the stream of Fanny's volubility, and turn the conversation to some subject on which she did not care to enter.

Agnes had been at home about a month when Mr. Vavasour made his threatened call. All the family were out at the time, so his card was the only thing we saw of him that day. Fanny disquieted herself very much on the occasion, and declared *she* should stay at home the next day to receive him, if Agnes would not.

Mr. Nesbit, when he joined the party before dinner, looked at Mr. Vavasour's card with an intentness that the little piece of cardboard hardly merited; it seemed as if he was trying to look beyond the evidence of the casual call to something far more important, but still connected with it. Agnes only took it up for a moment, with the observation,

"Oh, so Mr. Vavasour *is* come. He must have been sorry to find us all out."

"No doubt, if he is so very anxious to see you," replied Fanny; "he will call again to-morrow."

"Hardly likely," said Agnes, quietly,

the usages of civilized society being more familiar to her than to her cousin.

Agnes was, however, very tender and forbearing to Fanny under the circumstances, and remembering her imperfect education made every excuse for the many instances in which she was found wanting, often saying, if others were less indulgent, "How should poor Fanny know this or that?—but she is so quick, she will be sure to remember it next time."

It was not till after Basil Egerton's domestication in their family that these traits of vulgarity of thought and action made themselves painfully apparent. Fanny had before lived a life of quiet imitation of the ways of others, especially of Agnes, and had followed the usual habits of her uncle's house. She had had no temptation to coquetry, for there had been nothing to provoke the spirit which lay dormant in Fanny's bosom; she was, therefore, a far pleasanter and more ami-

able being than now, when she was agitated by various feelings more or less reprehensible and unamiable.

That Basil soon began to fathom her character, I cannot doubt, for one day, when Agnes kindly checked some unseemly outburst of opinion, Fanny turned to Basil, exclaiming—

"There, Mr. Egerton, I hope you will take my part, for Agnes is looking daggers at me for my little innocent remark." Then, seeing there was no mark of sympathy on Basil's countenance, and fearing to go too far with her cousin, she turned it all off with a laugh (rather forced, to be sure), and said—"I know I am a sad, impulsive creature, and given to speak my mind too freely, but—" and here she lowered her voice for Basil alone to hear—"but I ought to have learnt to keep silence in all subjection by this time."

"Well," replied Basil, as the person addressed, "you have every opportunity of

seeing and learning everything that is most charming and desirable in a woman." And then his looks rested on Agnes's sweet face, which, from its passing tinge of colour, showed that she had heard and noted all that passed, but was content to say no more.

Poor Fanny! her face was a picture of mortification and impotent anger at that moment; she could not trust herself to speak again, and soon after left the room. It was then that Basil Egerton observed to me with a smile, and speaking quite low,

"Yes, I have seen and judged for myself by this time how matters stand here; but to think of that girl"—looking towards the door through which Fanny had vanished—"to think of her daring to insinuate that she was 'put upon,' and to try to make herself out a sweet victim, and —it makes me angry to think of it—that her cousin was anything short of perfec-

tion! I only marvel at her never-failing sweetness and forbearance!"

Mr. Nesbit was not long in returning Mr. Vavasour's visit. He happened to know the gentleman with whom he was staying near Castleford. He was a Captain Allen, who had spent many years in India, and had been obliged to retire rather early invalided; but as he was a confirmed bachelor, his modest pension amply sufficed for all his wants. He lived in a large cottage in the middle of a good piece of garden ground, and there he passed most of his time, and found his chief amusement and occupation. When he came into Castleford, either to read the papers or for shopping purposes, he often called on his old friend and schoolfellow, Mr. Nesbit, and sometimes found his way upstairs to the drawing-room, where he did not disdain to sit down and have a chat with the girls.

It appeared he was pleased, but rather

in a fidget at the honour he was about to receive from his self-invited guest, Mr. Vavasour; he was a distant cousin, and though they had met frequently, years ago, in India, when Mr. Vavasour was a youngster, they had not much in common. Mr. Vavasour had risen to his influential post since Captain Allen's military days in India, but he had occasionally heard of him since as a great and prosperous man, and after he had proposed a visit to Captain Allen, that gentleman had often dilated to Mr. Nesbit upon the riches and grandeur of his connexion, Mr. Vavasour. Thus it came to pass that Mr. Nesbit was inclined to look very favourably upon his new acquaintance, for wealth had an irresistible attraction to the rich merchant; it was his one great weakness to worship the idol Mammon that had—as it was supposed—inclined so favourably to himself, and raised him from obscurity to consideration and honour in his native place.

Thus in a short time a considerable degree of intimacy sprang up between the two houses. It was early Summer at that time, and there were frequent walking and riding excursions, in which the two girls were escorted by the old Captain and his guest. Mr. Nesbit occasionally joined the party, but he generally preferred attending to the many calls upon his time in his own office. There also poor Basil Egerton was doomed to pass the greater number of his hours, and it must have been tantalising to the young man to listen to the history of the past day's amusement, or the projects formed for the morrow.

I saw but little of what passed that Summer, for my own marriage took place then, and Dr. Grey and I went for a short honeymoon excursion, before we returned to take up our final abode in Castleford.

When that time came, I found my friends, the Nesbits, in their old home,

everything seeming outwardly much the same as when I went away, but Mr. Vavasour was gone, and Captain Allen also was absent, making his yearly visit to an old friend at Cheltenham. I thought Agnes looked pale and anxious, and Fanny hopeful and cheerful. I suspected some crisis in the family affairs had occurred, and soon learnt the history.

It appeared that Mr. Vavasour had spoken to Mr. Nesbit, and declared his love for his daughter, at the same time telling him he could not flatter himself that he had as yet made the impression he desired; but he had hopes that Miss Nesbit did not object to or dislike him, so all he asked was to be allowed to try his chance with her, and endeavour to win her love, so that he might hope to take her back with him as his wife to India.

He spoke modestly enough of his position there, but said enough to show that it would be a very desirable one for his wife.

He also promised Mr. Nesbit that, in the course of a few years, he would resign his post, and come and live in England, adding that he should by that time have realized wealth enough to allow him to do so in a manner that would insure a splendid position to his wife.

It appeared astonishing that a rich man like Mr. Nesbit should have been dazzled by these prospects to such an extent as to promise his only daughter to Mr. Vavasour, in the event of a mutual attachment. But that latter proviso only appeared to be inserted for the sake of propriety, as Mr. Nesbit appeared to consider he had every right to dispose of his daughter, and—her affections!

Mr. Vavasour left the place soon after his proposal, fearing perhaps to press the matter too closely at first. He wished Agnes to consider well, he said, all the advantages, as well as the sacrifices she would be called upon to make, and only hoped, by

the devotion of his life, to make every amends for the latter, should she consent to become his wife.

There was much earnestness as well as honesty about the man's declaration, and Mr. Nesbit gave his ready and unqualified consent (with the proviso I have already mentioned), and it was settled that Mr. Vavasour was to return to Castleford in the Autumn, and remain there till the following Spring, when he was to return, after his year's absence, to India. He proposed taking rooms at the principal hotel, and bringing some horses down for hunting during the season. Of course Mr. Nesbit's house would be open to him at all times, and he would have every opportunity afforded for prosecuting his suit.

It seemed a strange methodical way of laying siege to a young girl's heart, and of eventually securing her hand, but the middle-aged, practical wooer, and the elderly merchant, arranged their plans be-

tween themselves, without any misgiving as to their future success.

And what did Agnes say to all this? Nothing!—absolutely *nothing!* when asked that searching question,

"But what do *you* say to all this, Agnes? and to Mr. Vavasour's coming back with the avowed intention of seeking you as his wife?"

"What can I say? No one has ever asked me anything. How can I refuse a man who has never offered to me, or said a word of love to me?"

"But it is well known what his intentions are, for it is understood he has told them to your father."

"Then my father must answer him—it is none of my concern."

"But it will be before long. And perhaps you are content with things as they are? You have made up your mind to become Mr. Vavasour's wife, to go out to India with him?"

Then Agnes seemed to wake up from her strange lethargy, as she pronounced, with calm decision, the one single word—"Never!"

Alas! poor Agnes! When her lips uttered that one word, no doubt her heart echoed the sound. She little knew how weak her young will was, or how strong was that of the man who so quietly, to all appearance, sought her for his wife. Far less did she divine how determined was the intention of her father that she should become so.

At that time I thoroughly believe that Agnes—though she saw the whole game that was so cunningly devised and mapped out to influence her future destiny—fully believed, whenever the fatal question was addressed to herself, that she would have but to speak the word, and all would be at an end.

Meanwhile it was evidently very distasteful to her to think of or talk upon the sub-

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ject. She seemed determined to ignore the whole proceeding. And then it occurred to me to wonder whether Agnes had any heart to bestow, and whether she was not living in a dreamland of her own, half unconsciously, perhaps, but yet so happily entranced that she feared to waken up, and thus dissolve the vision.

This idea occurred to me soon after our return to Castleford, when dining with a large party at the merchant's house. There was music, with cards and other devices for passing the time that evening. But sitting quietly apart on a sofa, and not joining in any of these amusements, my attention was drawn to a certain couple who approached each other after all the rest of the company were busily engaged. Mr. Nesbit was fully engrossed at his whist-table, where he sat, his whole heart and soul devoted to the mysteries of the game—and his partner. At the piano Fanny was in great force; not as a per-

former on the instrument, but joining in a glee, in which her high, powerful voice was making sweet melody, and with very good effect, too. Still I could see that her eyes turned ever and anon in the direction of the afore-mentioned couple.

They drew near to each other, but in a careless sort of way, such as might induce ordinary spectators to infer that it was chance, and not inclination or pre-meditation, that ruled their movements. The young man—Basil Egerton—was the first who spoke.

"Have you any fancy for chess this evening?" trying to look as indifferent as possible.

The young lady—Agnes—made answer in an equally indifferent tone.

"Well, I hardly know. It is difficult to give one's attention in such a large party."

"Never mind,"—more eagerly—"you need not attend to it."

"Very well," with a faint laugh, and the two drew a table between them, and sat down to a game of chess.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER that they played many more games at chess, and ere long became (as I had opportunities of observing) very deeply engrossed in a more serious and dangerous game, of which it was difficult to forecast what might be the result.

For a little time all went on quietly. Mr. Vavasour was absent, and Mr. Nesbit too closely engaged in business at home to look very intently into anything that might be passing, however near to him. He had evidently made up his mind as to the future disposal of his only child. She was to become a very rich and great lady in India for a time, and then was to be brought back to him, to gladden his de-

clining years with the sight of her, and her husband's prosperity.

All that was settled, he thought, and who could object? Not his obedient and dutiful daughter, who had hitherto made his wishes her laws; and least of all did the worthy merchant imagine danger from the penniless though well-born young clerk whom he had (he considered) taken into his house and office out of charity. So, for a time, the lovers went their way unchecked, falling deeper and deeper in love, and becoming all the world to each other.

Basil no doubt suspected in some measure the state of Fanny Nesbit's feelings both towards himself and her cousin; he was, therefore, careful to conceal the true state of things from her watchful eyes, and, at his request, Agnes reposed no confidence in Fanny. Possibly the latter was misled by their appearance of assumed indifference, and was anticipating

the time when she should be left her uncle's sole companion, and free to woo or be wooed by the recreant Basil, who would no doubt then (if he *had* wavered in the meantime from his allegiance) be willing and ready to return to his *premier amour*. Thus Fanny found consolation under the suspicions which no doubt (even with the utmost circumspection of the lovers) would at times assail her. However, looking to her future reward, she ignored all present discrepancies, and went the even tenor of her way, looking apparently neither to the right hand nor to the left, and feeling that it would be very impolitic to make herself unnecessarily disagreeable either to her cousin or to her own intended lover.

The real lovers, meanwhile, were enjoying their brief season of immunity from coming care and sorrow, and Agnes was, though agitated, yet happy for a season. As I have said, she looked very pale and

anxious, though prettier than ever; the more deeply she loved Basil, the more did she begin to realise how unpleasant the mere presence of another lover would be to herself, and to dread, as the time of Mr. Vavasour's return drew near, the possible collision of opinion between herself and her father.

Basil Egerton, too, began to nerve himself for the coming conflict. He was only too ready to step forward and claim the hand of the girl he loved so entirely and devotedly. He felt he was entitled, from his advantages of birth and education, to ask Mr. Nesbit even for that priceless treasure, his daughter, though the inequality of their gifts of fortune might cause a slight demur. But he was quite ready to wait and work for his bride, if her father considered such an ordeal needful.

In the meanwhile, both the young people were fully aware that they must have patience, and wait until Mr. Vavasour's

favoured pretensions were disposed of, before which it would not be at all likely that Mr. Nesbit would listen to or take any fresh proposals into consideration.

October was slowly drawing to a close when the moment dreaded by Agnes, but eagerly anticipated by Fanny, arrived. They heard that Mr. Vavasour was come to Castleford, and Mr. Nesbit, with evident satisfaction, announced he was to dine with the family party that day. The same afternoon Agnes called at my house, and begged me, if I was alone, to join their family dinner-party. She did not say why, but only observed that it would break the formality of the meeting, and if Dr. Grey could come also, so much the better; but he could not, so I went alone.

Mr. Nesbit and Agnes were already in the room, and Basil soon after glided in, took a distant seat, and appeared engrossed in a new novel. Mr. Vavasour was announced. Mr. Nesbit was the only

person who had seen him since his return, and it was his first meeting with Agnes in the character of her avowed suitor. I saw the poor girl grow pale to the very lips, whilst she tried to look unconscious, and asked him some trivial questions as to his journey, and where he had been passing his time—which, by the way, she might have very well known, as Mr. Nesbit had received constant letters from Mr. Vavasour, no doubt containing the information she sought, as well as various queries about all most interesting to himself at Castleford.

Mr. Vavasour was rather under-sized, but carried himself well, had good features, well-preserved hair and teeth, and was good-looking enough for his five and forty years. His dress was extremely *soigné*, and not altogether in bad taste. Still he seemed but an ill-suited pretender to the hand of the tall, graceful girl, who, coming forward, had remained for a moment beside him, making him appear even smaller and

shorter than he really was. Then Basil came out of his distant corner to answer the greeting of the newly-arrived guest, and, with his air of birth and good-breeding, made the contrast still more apparent, when he joined the ill-assorted pair. As he stood beside them, young, tall, and handsome, he looked much better suited to be Agnes's chosen lover.

Mr. Nesbit, however, saw no discrepancy in the match he was so anxious to secure. Mr. Vavasour's social importance and wealth were not diminished by want of inches to his stature, so he surveyed the pair with unmistakable complacency, and coming up to me, invited my participation in the satisfaction which was so evident.

Fanny Nesbit soon after made her appearance, and after that we all went to dinner. During that evening Fanny proved herself a very useful companion, and did her best to be a pleasant one. She was at that time far the most cheerful of the two

cousins. She laughed and talked to both Agnes's lovers, making the agreeable to Mr. Vavasour whenever opportunity offered, and also establishing a claim on Basil's gratitude by leaving an unoccupied place by Agnes, when the whole party, at Mr. Nesbit's desire, sat down to a round game of cards.

I saw that life had begun in dreadful earnest to Agnes, who, now that the time was really come, thought very differently of the conflict before her from what she did in the days when she declared she was contented to let things take their course, and to take hers as circumstances should decide.

Mr. Vavasour was, however, a cautious wooer, he had no idea of rushing in red-hot haste upon his fate before he had some idea of what that fate was likely to be. He had no doubt, with Mr. Nesbit's assistance, he was safe to carry the day, but he wished to win the girl's heart (whom he truly loved) as well as her hand. So he took things in a very leisurely way. He

had come to Castleford intending to spend the Winter; he had, moreover, brought two very handsome horses with him, for, Indian though he was, he was fond of hunting, and rode well. So his great ambition was to be accompanied to covert's side by Agnes Nesbit, and her cousin, if she liked to ride with them, as she always did.

It was very hard on Basil, who loved sport dearly, to see the girl he worshipped lifted on to her horse by the man who was to accompany her throughout the morning, and by that means help to make known the terms on which he was supposed to stand with the rich merchant's daughter. I do not think poor Basil ever cared to leave his desk to glance at the riding-party, as they took their way on those mornings, when the hounds met sufficiently near to allow of the Miss Nesbits riding with Mr. Vavasour in that direction.

The two girls generally returned from covert side attended by their groom,

and sometimes by Mr. Nesbit himself, who considered an early morning's ride very "constitutional."

And thus it came to pass that Agnes was led into daily companionship with Mr. Vavasour, and everyone in the town and in the neighbourhood fully believed in their engagement. There were many parties and dances that Winter, and Mr. Vavasour's presence was eagerly sought by the givers of such entertainments, both on his own account, and on that of his supposed connexion with the Nesbits.

So the time drifted on, and Christmas came and went. Not a word had been spoken to alarm Agnes, or drag the secret of her heart into the light of day and open discussion. She was to a certain extent happy, though it was in a feverish uncertain sort of way. When Basil was invited, as he frequently was, to the parties in the town and neighbourhood, he and Agnes could only enjoy brief snatches of the joy

of being together; yet if it were but for one dance, or to sit by each other at dinner or supper, it was for the time being a perfect Paradise of enjoyment—none the less so, perhaps, for its having something of the taste of "forbidden fruit" in it.

Everything must come to an end, and so did, at last, those days of uncertain, restless enjoyment. Christmas came and went, and the new year dawned. With what hopes and fears did it open to Agnes and her young lover! To the elder one with what pleasing visions of successful love in a happy future!

There was one person, however, in that narrow circle to whom time, as it advanced, did not appear to bring pleasure on its wings. That solitary individual was Mr. Nesbit. There might have been various causes for the good merchant's evident uneasiness; there was no disguising the fact that he began to look careworn and anxious. Perhaps he was griev-

ing over the coming separation between himself and his one loving daughter, which he had himself so eagerly planned, or it might be that he began to have suspicions as to the state of his child's affections, and therefore he was anticipating the failure of his cherished hopes from want of ability to enforce them. It might be so, but certain it is that about that time doubtful rumours began to be circulated in the town, no one knew how or why, as to the stability of all Mr. Nesbit's mercantile proceedings. Some said he had embarked in too many ventures to be safe, and that he had never had the capital to trade upon—that was reported. Then people declared that no doubt there were certain reasons which had induced Mr. Nesbit so vehemently to favour the suit of a man old enough to be his daughter's father, and that Mr. Vavasour's wealth might possibly be useful to prop his failing credit; but I need not re-

peat half of the whispers and surmises which suddenly rose in respect to Mr. Nesbit's mercantile prosperity.

One thing, however, is certain that, one cold, dismal-looking morning towards the end of January, Basil Egerton was summoned to a private conference with Mr. Nesbit. He went to the merchant's private room, fully believing that the hour of doom had arrived. His heart was beating high with the hope that his love might now be confessed, and that, however unwilling the rich man might be to confer such a prize as Agnes upon him in preference to her wealthy suitor, he would now, when once Mr. Nesbit knew the real state of his child's affections, and the unfathomable depth of the love that she had inspired, incline favourably towards them. He had made up his mind, as he walked towards the room, to be very moderate in his demands, and only crave permission to work his way to such inde-

pendence as might entitle him afterwards to ask the coveted boon of that daughter's hand when he should have achieved such success in the world as to deserve it.

The young man, with all these hopes (and not without some fears) in his honest heart, and almost legible on his candid countenance, stood before the man who held, as it were, his destiny in his hand. Basil waited respectfully for his superior to speak first.

There was a slight pause, and then Mr. Nesbit drew a foreign-looking letter towards him, and began to talk to his clerk on a matter almost as foreign to his thoughts and expectations. At first Basil could hardly follow the drift of the conversation for astonishment, and the pre-occupation of his mind. But he gradually woke up to the understanding that Mr. Nesbit was speaking to him of the failure of a large house at Lyons, with which he had for many years had considerable mercantile

dealings, and without following his discourse more closely, he found that Mr. Nesbit, who knew him to be a fair linguist, was offering him a post of trust and confidence, for which he would afterwards give him the necessary instructions, which he was to remain at Lyons to see effectually carried out.

There was, of course, no refusing the task which was entrusted to him. In what spirit it was positively conferred Basil could hardly tell—however, it had on the surface an appearance of trust that flattered him, though afterwards, in the hurry of thought which preceded his departure, and in the confusion which reigned in his mind, Basil was dimly conscious of a sense of injury. Something whispered to him that he was being got out of the way for a time, but at whose suggestion there was nothing to point out.

The time of preparation was very short, and he had everything to learn as to the

details of the business he was sent to carry out. All these minute particulars were communicated to him by the head manager of Mr. Nesbit's house of business, and the good man was pleased to express himself much satisfied by the quickness and clearness of young Egerton's perceptions on the occasion, and he gave it as his unbiassed opinion that Mr. Nesbit could nowhere have selected a more competent person to conduct the affair than Mr. Basil Egerton.

Basil was therefore obliged to silence the tormenting voice within, and apply himself heart and soul to the mission on which he was bound. But before he went he was determined to have one parting interview with Agnes. He hoped and expected to get back in a short time, but he must meanwhile be prepared for any contingency that might arise, and, above all, he must be ready to carry out his darling's wishes, whatever should happen.

CHAPTER V.

ALTHOUGH Basil and Agnes were in the habit of meeting every day, it was always in the presence of others, and it was by no means easy to secure the private interview on which Basil had set his heart. However, Fate, or their good (or evil) genius, favoured them in this matter. A few days before Basil started on his expedition, he went over to his uncle's place to tell them of his hasty departure, and also of his whereabouts when in France, and returning rather early, found Mr. Nesbit and Fanny, as well as Mr. Vavasour, gone out to dinner. Agnes had been complaining for some days of a bad cold, and made that the excuse for remaining at

home. She had been in great distress from the time when she first heard of Basil's intended departure, and I think she found a bad cold a good excuse for heavy eyes, pallid cheeks, and general languor of deportment.

She felt that the crisis of her fate was approaching, and dreaded the time when Basil would be absent, and she should be left alone to endure the attentions of her would-be lover. It was therefore infinite relief to her mind to have a short time of uninterrupted talk with Basil, to enjoy the rare delight of being alone together, to lay their hearts open to each other, and to make their little plans for the future.

Agnes was extremely depressed that evening, though she took comfort in the reassuring presence of her lover, who tried to place all things in the most cheering and favourable point of view. Basil said nothing of his own misgivings as to the possible reason of his being sent away just

then; he only dwelt on the honour conferred on him by the commission entrusted to his care, spoke hopefully of his speedy return, and still more so of the happy future which lay before them, whether it came a little sooner or later.

Poor Agnes, though tearful and depressed, yet felt soothed and strengthened as she sat with her head on Basil's shoulder, his strong arm round her slender waist, and her hand resting in his firm and tender clasp.

"You will come back the very instant you have concluded all that horrible business," was the burden of Agnes's discourse.

"Trust me, my darling; and when I return, I hope I shall find your friend gone."

"*My* friend, Basil!—papa's friend, you mean. I always look upon, and treat him, and talk to him as such; and really at times I begin to hope that he will not ask for anything more—that he will see the

utter and entire impossibility of my ever looking upon him in any other light, and will spare himself the mortification of any further explanation."

"Ah! dearest," replied Basil, "it may not be quite so easy to give up all hope of gaining your love as you may think."

"But *you* know quite well, Basil, that it can never, *never* be anyone's but yours."

"I hope so indeed, and if I exist to all eternity, I shall never, never love anyone but you, Agnes. No one on earth but my Agnes shall ever be her 'Basil's bride.'"

Agnes half smiled through her tears, and unwittingly shook her pretty head, as if the idea was too entrancing ever to be realised. Basil was sitting by the table, resting his right arm on it, whilst his left embraced Agnes, who was nearest the fire. In an idle whim Basil took up a pen that, with paper and ink, lay at his elbow, and quickly wrote on the paper the last words he had spoken, adding to them,

"And this I solemnly swear." He then handed the paper to Agnes, who put it to her lips, saying,

"And will you never repent, dear?"

Basil only replied:

"Never, so heaven help me!"

Then said Agnes,

"Would you like me to write the same for you to keep, Basil?"

He answered,

"No, dearest, I do not need it; you shall never be bound by me. Your dear love is a free and most precious gift, and I feel and know that I have it."

"I feel the same, Basil, and yet I am so much weaker and more foolish than you, that this dear little bit of paper will be my daily comfort and support. Oh! Basil, when you are far away, I shall read it over and over again, and feel that you are thinking of me also."

"But I wish to give another little remembrance of me, which you must prom-

ise to wear on your finger till the time comes when I shall place another there."

Then Basil drew out a ring, which he told Agnes had been his mother's bridal gift from his father, and was very precious to him, besides being valuable in itself. It was a broad gold hoop ring, set with alternate diamonds and emeralds, and inside the ring was engraved his mother's maiden name, and the date of her marriage to his father.

Agnes at first demurred a little at receiving (or, as she said, "taking") from her lover what must be such a precious relic to him. Basil only pressed the ring upon her finger, saying quietly,—

"Take it, dearest, and wear it for my sake; it is the only valuable I possess in the world, and you are dearer to me now and ever than anything else in the world, so it is right and fit that you should possess it. Besides, you *must* do as I wish."

Agnes laughed at his little air of au-

thority, for she was beginning to feel almost happy under the genial influence of Basil's presence and his loving words. So the time slipped away, till, to their mutual surprise, they heard the carriage stop at the door, and the loud ring which announced the return of the diners out. Agnes had only time to run upstairs to her own room, whilst Basil remained quietly seated with a book in his hand, awaiting the entrance of Mr. Nesbit and his niece.

Fanny glanced somewhat suspiciously round the room, as if she suspected that Agnes was somewhere concealed, but was re-assured by Basil's look of cool self-possession whilst he asked her some trifling questions respecting the party to which she had been.

Mr. Nesbit stood on the hearth-rug warming himself at the fire, with an abstracted and somewhat gloomy countenance; at last, interrupting Fanny rather

impatiently, as she was in the middle of a little story, he said,

"There, there, my dear, that will do for the present. You can tell the rest of it to-morrow. Mr. Egerton and I have something more important to talk about than all that nonsense."

Fanny was all amiability to her uncle, and only replied,

"Oh! to be sure, uncle. I ought to have thought of that, only as Mr. Egerton was not there, I fancied he would like to know how much the Miss Timms regretted his absence."

And then Fanny, with a gracious good night to both gentlemen, took up her candle and went up to bed. She stopped at Agnes's room, tapped at her door, and would have gone in, but there was no response, and when she gently tried to turn the handle she found the door was locked on the other side. So she had to content herself with a whispered "Good night, Agnes," and

a further whisper to herself, as she walked away, "I wonder if she is asleep, or only shamming? and I wonder whether she has been downstairs at all this evening? and I wonder when *he* came home? but I do not like to ask. Perhaps I shall find out somehow or other."

But I do not think she ever did find out, for Agnes was on her guard, and so was Basil, and the day after the next he took his leave for Lyons.

The calm that followed Basil's departure was something like the treacherous tranquillity that often precedes the outbreak of a storm. It was about the second week in February when Basil left Castleford, and the weather was cold, dark, and dull. Mr. Nesbit especially seemed to feel the adverse influence of the murky atmosphere, and Agnes continued to complain of the cold that had done her such good service for some time past. Fanny was perplexed and rather cast down, but the most lively

of the family party. Mr. Vavasour, was the only really cheerful person at that time in the small circle that daily met at Mr. Nesbit's hospitable table. There were occasional guests invited to vary the home scene, but neither Mr. Nesbit nor his daughter appeared equal to the task of much entertaining. Everybody said, seeing how dejected they appeared, what a sad thing it was that such an affectionate father and daughter should be separated—it was evident how much they both dreaded it.

After Basil had been gone a few weeks, Mr. Vavasour, seeing a favourable opportunity when alone with Agnes, spoke out at last. All that he said was very much to the point, it proved the depth of his love, and his patience in waiting for a return.

He told Agnes he still feared she might have hardly regarded him in the light he desired, and he would not have urged his suit so soon, only he was to return to India in April, and he had her father's permission

to entreat her to accompany him there as his wife. He said a great deal more, for having said nothing to Agnes of the love that was in his heart during the time of his silent wooing, there appeared to be no end to all he had to tell her on the subject when once he had begun to speak.

Agnes never interrupted him; but she gave him no encouragement by word or look to proceed. She felt surprised at the warmth of the affection she had so unintentionally inspired; but though she knew she ought to feel obliged at the compliment paid her by such a man as Mr. Vavasour, she felt, at the same time, half indignant. She sat with her hands pressed together, only feeling the ring that Basil had placed there, and gathering up her strength to crush the hopes which she felt sure rose so high in her ardent suitor's heart.

As she sat thus silent and abstracted, with bent head and quivering lips, Mr. Vavasour paused for a moment; he began

to fancy she was displeased at the long silence he had observed towards herself, and hastened, after a short pause, to exonerate himself from any idea of lukewarmness in the part he had thought best to adopt; he told her, having her father's full and glad consent to his suit, he went a more leisurely way to gain hers. She was so young, so lovely, so innocent, he thought it best to accustom her to his devotion, though unexpressed, before she should be drawn into anything like an engagement. Then, he continued, he wished her to understand him thoroughly, to see him just as he was, and without any of the prestige which surrounded him in India. He talked before her of all that interested him, in the hope that she, too, might find a lively interest in the same subjects and pursuits, and as he was informed by her father her heart was still untouched, he trusted to make such a gradual impression on it as might

influence her to bestow the inestimable treasure on himself.

But it is needless to pursue the tenor of Mr. Vavasour's discourse any further. Enough has been said to explain the substance and the manner of it, and the nature of the task imposed on Agnes, when bent on rejecting him, and all he had to bestow. However, refuse him and all his offers she *did*, and that with rather scant ceremony. Her heart was full to overflowing with love for her young and handsome absent lover, so she had but little compassion for the prosaic, precise, middle-aged man who strove, in plain matter-of-fact language, to impress upon her mind the extent of his love and all the many advantages included therein.

Mr. Vavasour, on Agnes's quiet declaration that she could never love him as he desired, and that she had always looked upon him only in the light of her father's

friend, seemed at first almost bewildered, and as if it were more than his understanding could receive. He almost gasped for breath as he exclaimed—

"But surely, Miss Nesbit, you must have guessed my intentions when I asked your permission to visit here? I knew nothing of your father, and it was only as *your* friend I came to this house, and hoping to be received as such."

Agnes only looked wearied at his importunity, and briefly observed she was sorry if she had misunderstood him; but it did not appear incumbent on her to refuse the visit of a friend or an acquaintance, for fear he should become a lover. After Agnes had made that little speech, she seemed to consider it decisive, and rose quietly, and without another word left the room.

She found Fanny waiting for her on the landing between their respective rooms, and the former, rushing up to Agnes, seized both

her hands, and kissing her effusively, said she hoped she might congratulate her, and her uncle too, on the fulfilment of all his wishes, and the prospect of such happiness and prosperity as awaited her on becoming the wife of Mr. Vavasour.

Till that moment Agnes had never thought of her father, or taken his wishes into consideration, and a sudden chill fell upon her heart, which had just begun to rejoice in the sense of having got through a very unpleasant affair with as little pain and trouble as possible. She also indulged in the hope that, now she had spoken, Mr. Vavasour would quietly take his departure, and she should neither see nor hear anything more of him, and would then only have to count the days till her Basil's return; and after that—— Farther than that she could not see into the future; all she asked was Mr. Vavasour's departure and Basil's return as soon as possible.

Agnes caught her hands away from her

cousin's detaining grasp, and with an irritability quite new to her, begged she would mind her own affairs, and leave her to take care of her own; and as for Mr. Vavasour, the only thing she wished about him was that she might never see his face or hear his voice again. Fanny, quite astonished, lifted her hands in surprise and deprecation at this outbreak from her usually quiet, gentle cousin. She then recoiled a step or two, applied her handkerchief to her tearless eyes, and declared that "dear Agnes was so altered no one could know her for the same person she was when she first came to live with her." These reproaches, whether deserved or not, had only the effect of irritating Agnes's naturally tender nature; but the worst part of that unlucky day was still to come.

Mr. Nesbit sent for his daughter after Mr. Vavasour had communicated to him the unfortunate result of his interview with Agnes. It was rather an awful sum-

mons to be sent for into Mr. Nesbit's private room. But hitherto Agnes had never known what it was to fear in the presence of her fond father. He had been so indulgently kind to her that the voice of displeasure, as directed against herself, had never yet fallen on her ear. Why should she then be conscious of such a trembling in her limbs, and sinking at her heart, when, towards the evening, the unwelcome summons was brought to her? However, there was nothing to be done but to obey. In a few minutes Agnes stood before her father.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. NESBIT was sitting at his writing-table with paper before him, and a pen in his hand; he seemed to be putting down figures, and was so deeply engrossed in his employment that he did not look up, even when his daughter came and stood close beside him. At length Agnes said,

"You sent for me, papa?"

"Yes, I know. Sit down."

Agnes obeyed, and after a little time Mr. Nesbit laid down his pen with a weary sigh, and then looked up at his daughter—and fixed an inquiring gaze on her face, as if trying to penetrate beneath the surface of that assumed calm which rested on her countenance. Agnes met the look with

something of an impatient turn both of her head and of her whole person—it seemed to say,

"Say what you please. I am prepared for the worst."

Then Mr. Nesbit spoke slowly and with an effort.

"Is it true what I hear, that you have refused Mr. Vavasour's most eligible and desirable offer of marriage? Or is it, as I am inclined to hope, a mere freak of girlish folly and indecision?"

There was something so new to Agnes in the cold tone of her father's voice, and his mode of speaking to her, that she felt a great lump come swelling into her throat, and her eyes filled quickly with tears, as she said,

"Dear papa, you are not angry with me because I cannot love Mr. Vavasour, and would a thousand times rather remain with you here than go with him to India?"

"But if it is for your good, and mine

too, that you should accept the offer Mr. Vavasour makes you, and of which any girl might be proud, do not you think you ought to put your childish objections aside, and do what he asks, and, I may add, that I wish also ?"

"Oh ! papa, you can never *wish* to send me away—and it would break my heart to go; besides, I could never care for Mr. Vavasour, so please, papa, say no more about it. I have given Mr. Vavasour his answer."

And then Agnes drew near to her father, and put her arms round his neck and began to caress him as she was so often in the habit of doing. But in his present mood these caresses only seemed to annoy and irritate Mr. Nesbit; he drew away from his daughter's arm, turned his face from her kiss, and exclaimed, in an impatient tone,

"Yes, indeed, it is easy to 'say no more about it;' and you have given *your* answer,

and a very fine answer no doubt it was! Yes, you are like the rest of the world, ready to follow your own way, and do your own pleasure, never regarding the feelings or wishes of those to whom you owe everything—only intent on your own self-gratification! And this is the end of all your boasted filial affection!—this is the rich reward I am to reap from my dutiful daughter! After having spent all *my* life in consulting *her* ease and gratification, toiling night and day to heap up riches for her benefit, the very first time I ask her to do something—and that something greatly to her own advantage—to please and benefit me, she turns round and bids me hold my tongue, for she has settled the whole matter—a pretty daughter I have got, indeed!"

By this time Agnes was kneeling at her father's feet, and sobbing as if her heart would break, and crying,

"Oh, say no more. I cannot love Mr.

Vavasour, and I hate him now for coming between us, and making you so angry with your own poor little Agnes, that you have loved and petted all the days of her life before, and who loves you so dearly."

Mr. Nesbit turned hastily round to his daughter, and looking her full in the face, said,

"Yes, talking is easy enough, but when it comes to action, it is quite another thing."

"But surely you would not wish me to marry a man I do not love?"

"How the girl prates about love!" exclaimed the merchant, testily, as he continued—"What do you know about love? Did not you invite Vavasour here yourself? It was all your own doing; *I* never asked him to come, or brought him here to dance attendance on you as he has done, till you have made yourself the talk of the town, and if you now refuse to marry him, I say you will have behaved to him like a

heartless coquette, and I am ashamed of you."

"Oh, stop, papa—pray stop!" said poor Agnes, crying bitterly. "You are very unkind and unjust to me for the first time in my life, and I cannot bear it."

"No more can I," replied her father, "so you had better go to your own room and think the matter over, like a sensible, rational girl, if you wish me to have any comfort or pride in you again. There, go along now, for I have enough to do and think about, and your folly and obstinacy only tend to sicken and distract me—there, go away!"

Thus dismissed, Agnes went away, weeping bitterly. She passed her cousin on the stairs, and so near her father's room that it is not impossible that some part of her uncle's angry speeches might have caught Fanny's ear. Agnes, however, swept past her, and gaining her own room, threw herself on her bed in a per-

fect agony of distress, mingled with indignation at the reproaches cast upon her, whilst she felt unbounded anger against Mr. Vavasour as the cause of all this strange misery and misunderstanding between herself and her father. Oh! what would she not have given for the merest glimpse of Basil's beloved and comforting countenance! She could have clung to him, and with him openly braved still fiercer anger for the great love she bore him. She had, however, no one to turn to; she instinctively felt that her cousin Fanny was not her true friend on the occasion. After a time, she did indeed come to me as a friend both of Basil Egerton and herself, and from her lips I heard all that I have now set down. But I was powerless to help her in any way. Nothing would have induced me to become the medium of a clandestine correspondence between herself and her lover, and she had no means of communicating with him

herself. All letters for their house came in Mr. Nesbit's post-bag, and were by him distributed to the family; neither do I think that either she or Basil anticipated any necessity for writing during their brief separation, doubtless hoping nothing unforeseen would occur to render such a step necessary.

The wretched days passed on. Mr. Nesbit became more gloomy, more irritable, and still Mr. Vavasour stayed on in Castleford. Occasionally Mr. Nesbit insisted on his dining with him, and then nothing could be more unexceptionable than his conduct. He met Agnes with kindness, but without any loverlike pretensions, and seemed ready to subside into the friendly position that Agnes had once assigned to him. She even began to feel that the evenings were more endurable when Mr. Vavasour was present than when alone with her father and Fanny. She longed incessantly for Basil's return, but dared not ask, or show

her anxiety—fearing she was already open to suspicion. Fanny ventured one day to put the question to her uncle, saying,

"We all seem to miss Mr. Egerton, he is so cheerful and pleasant. I suppose he will be coming back soon?"

As the guarded question was put, Agnes was sensible of a flutter at her heart, and a confusion of ideas that almost stopped her hearing as well as her breath; she grew cold and white, but happily was prevented from fainting by the fact that she was reclining on the sofa, and felt safe amongst its ample cushions. She was, however, aware that her father darted an inquiring glance towards her, and also that the same look travelled round slowly, till it met the gaze of Mr. Vavasour, then rested on Fanny's face, as he made answer—

"So you are beginning to pine for the young man's company, Miss Fan! Well, you must have a little patience, for you will not see him yet awhile. The business he

went out upon is much more intricate and difficult than was at first apprehended; he has left Lyons already, but I cannot tell you exactly where he is now, as there are several places he will have to visit in the course of business, and he hardly knows till he gets to one place where he shall have to go next."

"Dear me," said Fanny, composedly, "what a traveller Mr. Basil will be before he comes back, and it seems that will not be yet awhile."

"I should think not," said her uncle, shortly; and then, looking towards his daughter, but still speaking to Fanny, he said, "A good deal depends upon *how* Mr. Basil Egerton acquits himself in this present matter; if he does well, I am ready to promote his views and his interest in life, but if I find him tampering with my concerns, or playing an underhand part in *any* respect, let him look to the consequences! They will be such as neither he

nor any of his fair friends can anticipate or desire."

Fanny saw and felt there was much beneath the surface in this speech, and was sure her uncle had some suspicions that either she or Agnes had some undue regard for the young dependant man, possibly to the prejudice of Mr. Vavasour. As for Agnes, she felt as if her cup of misery was running over, and she could bear no more. She was dimly conscious that her father suspected her and Basil, and that he would manage to keep them always apart, and if Basil made the slightest step towards her, her father would, in some mysterious way, use the power of which he boasted to injure him in every possible way.

Worse things, however, were in store for the Nesbit family. The mercantile storm Mr. Nesbit had long been endeavouring to avert broke over his house in a very sudden and unexpected manner. But with positive ruin staring him in the face, he

became kinder and gentler again to his child. It was in the suspense that had been torturing him to such an extent that all his feelings had seemed turned to gall.

It was then that Mr. Vavasour came forward in the kindest and most liberal way with offers of help. He put off his return to India, and exerted himself in the most generous manner to uphold the credit of the falling man. He did not, however, at that time ask for the reward which he craved as earnestly as ever.

Poor Agnes lived in a tempest of conflicting feelings and interests. Her father, now that the crisis was over, returned to his former kind ways. He seemed as if anxious to make amends for his past harshness, and spoke feelingly, as if appealing to her pity and tenderness, in telling her that his trouble of mind at one time was so great that he even contemplated self-destruction, and that he then believed the only possible step to avoid the evil he

dreaded lay in gaining her consent to marry Mr. Vavasour. He further declared with tears that he had no idea of the possibility of such unbounded generosity and disinterested kindness as he had since received from Mr. Vavasour; for although that gentleman had relinquished the hope of gaining her for his wife, he had shown the same desire to serve her father.

Agnes saw and felt that this was very true. The dread of bankruptcy, which had crushed her father to the earth, was removed by the timely help of Mr. Vavasour; and yet more, he sought and claimed no other reward than the satisfaction of helping his friend. Mr. Nesbit declared, although he could now devote all his energies to the repayment of the pecuniary part of his debt, and hoped to do so, yet the larger and heavier part of his obligation must remain for ever unliquidated.

During this period of extreme worry and excitement, Agnes had been in great

measure lifted out of the contemplation of her own individual cares and troubles; her old love to her father had rushed back in full force when she saw him in trouble and sorrow, whilst she was aware that the impending dread of bankruptcy was most terrible to his imagination, and that he had looked to her in vain to help him out of the depths of his distress. How could she do otherwise than feel unbounded gratitude to the generous friend who, in spite of her rejection, had done all that friendship could devise for his relief?

Although Agnes's heart was steeled against reproaches and displeasure, it melted under the genial influences of tenderness and magnanimity. Mr. Nesbit's health had become shaken from the intense trouble of his mind, and all his daughter's care then was to nurse him in illness, and watch his slow recovery.

Fanny was everything that could be desired at that time—cheerful and helpful,

devoted to her uncle, and amiable to her cousin. Mr. Vavasour found in her a very faithful ally, quite ready, and more than willing, to seize every favourable opportunity of setting forth his virtues in their most shining light in her cousin's eyes, and singing his praises, if not directly to Agnes, yet in her hearing.

The time rapidly approached for Mr. Vavasour's departure. Basil was still absent. Mr. Nesbit found in him a most useful foreign agent (as he was a good linguist), and his time was fully employed in executing the business that was entrusted to him. He had not received any letter or message from Agnes all the time, and he felt there was no use in his writing, as his letters might never reach her. Report had told him, through some Castleford friend, that Miss Nesbit had refused Mr. Vavasour. He fully believed this rumour, and while cheerfully working his way to independence, was contented to bide his time.

Soon after that time came a startling piece of intelligence to my ears. I could not believe it. But this report said that Mr. Vavasour was going to marry Miss Nesbit, and take her back with him to India! I then began to think that he must have changed the object of his devotion, and fixed his affections on Fanny Nesbit instead of her more charming cousin. A thousand little trifles light as air then recurred to my recollection in confirmation of this new idea, and I waited impatiently to hear more, if, indeed, the whole rumour was not, as often happens, an idle tale.

That very afternoon Agnes came to see me. Her face was pale, and the expression unusually set and determined. She came in and kissed me—then said, in a low voice,

"I came to tell you myself. You may have heard something of it, but I wished to let you know. I have consented to marry Mr. Vavasour, and I go with him next month to India."

She looked in my face to see the impression made by her communication, and I suppose read there my unfeigned blank astonishment. I really could not speak, and she continued—

"Yes, it is quite true. I have nothing to tell you about it, or how it has happened. He deserved it at my hands. He has saved my poor father's life and credit, and would have gone away without hope or reward."

Agnes pressed her hand to her forehead and said, as I wished her all happiness,

"I do not look for happiness. I only wish to do what is right. Only please tell *him*—Basil, I mean—that I could not help myself. I shall be gone before he returns, but do not let him think I forgot him."

CHAPTER VII.

IT was all true, then, and Agnes was false—in appearance at least—to her love! Poor girl, she must have been sorely tried before she had resolved on the step she was about to take. She would not enter into any discussion on the subject. She only wished I should know her marriage was resolved on, and thus be spared all inquiry, and, if possible, all comment.

Her consent having once been given, there was no further delay than was necessary to prepare Agnes's wedding outfit for India. I believe she was very passive on the occasion. But there was not much need for her to trouble or exert herself; all that money could do or pur-

chase was at hers and her father's command. Mr. Vavasour, throughout that trying time, was everything that could be desired, and his great love for his bride was only evinced in the quietest and most delicate manner. I really think Mr. Nesbit felt the parting with his son-in-law almost as much as losing his daughter. Only one request was made by Agnes, and that was that the wedding should be entirely private, and confined to their own family circle.

Thus, when the important day came, Agnes was only attended by Fanny as her sole bridesmaid, whilst her father gave her away, and old Captain Allen acted as best man to the bridegroom. The newly-married pair left at the church door for Southampton, and Castleford saw them no more. It was not a melancholy parting at that time, as Mr. Nesbit and Fanny were to visit Mr. and Mrs. Vavasour at Southampton in the course of a week or ten days, and remain with them till they embarked.

Everything was carried out as arranged, and the wedding, the visit afterwards, and the final parting duly accomplished without let or hindrance; and then Mr. Nesbit and his niece returned to the solitary house, and he began to realise his loss. I need not dwell upon that time, though everyone observed that Mr. Nesbit was an altered man since the panic in his affairs and departure of his daughter. The thing he had so greatly longed for, and had realized, did not appear to bring him the ease and comfort he expected. He toiled on at his business affairs, and became almost miserly in his vain efforts to heap up riches, and to regain his credit as a wealthy man.

Fanny grumbled amongst her intimates at her uncle's increasing parsimony and love of money. She declared all her comforts were curtailed, and the luxuries to which she had become accustomed were utterly abolished. One great joy, however, remained to her, when, after a length-

ened period, Basil Egerton returned to Castleford. He had been absent more than a year, but looked ten years older than he did when he left Mr. Nesbit's. He was become graver, and altered in every way, but in Fanny's eyes more fascinating than ever. Her rejoicing was of brief continuance, for Basil only came to Castleford to give up his situation as Mr. Nesbit's foreign agent. He had been in his employment nearly three years, and at the end of that time wished to relinquish his post. He had the offer of an excellent appointment abroad, and he had consented to take it as soon as his connection with Mr. Nesbit was dissolved. However, Fanny felt, if she made the most of her time then, it might lead to future and more satisfactory relations with the man she began to love with all her heart.

Basil Egerton came to see me soon after his return, and to ask if there was any message left by Agnes for him. He

seemed to understand the whole transaction, and his only feelings for her were love and intense pity.

"Poor darling! how she must have suffered!" was all the comment he made on her pitiful little message; and then, a moment afterwards, he added—"May God bless her for ever and ever, and may the man who has taken my darling away from me know how to value such an inestimable treasure!"

Fanny at times tried to talk of her cousin to him, but Basil never responded to her efforts to become confidential; he was gentle and kind to the dependent girl, but at the expiration of his time took leave of her and Mr. Nesbit without a word of hope as to their ever meeting again; and then he went to Marseilles, where his new sphere of work was situated, and thus for several years we saw no more of Basil Egerton.

The accounts from India continued for

a time most flourishing, and Mr. Nesbit's whole soul seemed wrapt up in visions of the grandeur and prosperity of Mr. and Mrs. Vavasour. Agnes, when she wrote, said but little of herself or her own feelings; but in a country where everything was so new to her there was plenty of interesting matter to write about, and Mr. Vavasour supplied all deficiencies by the long reports he wrote concerning his wife, and the admiration that followed her wherever she appeared.

Poor Fanny read these accounts with ill-concealed envy and jealousy. Her own life was now so colourless, so full of little mean troubles, and petty cares and economies, that to read these glowing representations of Oriental splendour and luxury was certainly rather tantalizing to a girl of Fanny's nature and calibre. How yearningly she longed to be a participator in all these bewildering scenes which surrounded her cousin.

The time was far nearer than she could have imagined. Two years after Agnes left Castleford her father was taken very ill again. He had never entirely regained either his health or strength of mind or body after his former illness. There is no occasion to dwell upon the event that now occurred. Mr. Nesbit rapidly declined, and before the extent of his danger was realized he died. Agnes had been apprised of his illness, and was ready to go over to him when she received the news of his death. As soon as that intelligence reached Agnes and her husband, they both, in the kindest way, sent to Fanny a pressing invitation to join them in India. It need not be said that Fanny most gladly and eagerly obeyed the summons, and having received every necessary instruction, as well as a handsome remittance for an outfit, she lost no time in making her preparations, and in the course of a few months we heard of her safe arrival in India.

At that time I heard occasionally from Agnes. It was pleasant to keep the thread of our old intercourse in some degree unbroken, and it was from her that I heard of Fanny's being settled with them, and subsequently of her marriage with a young officer in a native regiment.

Thus all the persons of my little history passed from the scene of our daily existence, and were for a time lost to view. The remaining chapters of their several lives appeared to be closed to our inspection for ever. But it was not to be so, we were destined to hear more yet of some of our old friends. The first event of any interest which occurred after the lapse of a dozen years, was the return of Basil Egerton into our neighbourhood, as the proprietor of the family place about three miles from Castleford. The deaths in his family which placed him in that position were numerous and sad. Two of the young Egertons fell in the Crimea, one

young son died of fever at Eton, and the eldest, a fine young man, met with his death in the hunting-field.

Poor Mrs. Egerton was thus left, after her husband's death, with an only daughter, but slenderly provided for, the estates were strictly entailed on the male heir, and the old Squire had spent all the available money that came to his hands. His wife, a charming woman, and the daughter of a neighbouring Squire, had brought nothing to add to the family fortunes.

She had passed the two first years of her widowhood in a small foreign town, but, at Basil's earnest entreaty, had been spending a twelvemonth at her old home at the time of which I now speak, and which was the third year from his coming into possession of the family property. It was a hard trial to Mrs. Egerton, and to her daughter also, this coming back to Newton Priors—the name of Mr. Egerton's place. Happily Basil had always been a

favourite both with his aunt and his cousin Mary. They had known him very well in his earlier days. Mary was then quite a child, but she always retained an affectionate remembrance of her "Cousin Basil."

Mary was now three and twenty, whilst Basil was somewhere about six or seven and thirty. He had retained all the good looks which had distinguished him when at Mr. Nesbit's some fifteen years before. His manners, which had always been those of a well-bred man, had gained something in dignity and decision, the result of time and enlarged intercourse with the world and with society, whilst his tall, commanding figure retained all the supple activity of his youthful days. He was altogther as fine a specimen of an English gentleman of fortune and position as could be imagined.

He was altering and fitting up a pretty cottage in the park for his aunt and cousin, to which they were to remove when it

should be ready for their reception. Popular opinion, however, decided that Mary Egerton was likely to remain a fixture in her cousin's house, and the home of her infancy. I hoped it might be so, for Mary Egerton was a very charming girl, and there was no doubt she greatly liked and admired her cousin Basil, although several years older than herself. I had many opportunities of observing them together, for now that Mr. Egerton was a rich and influential person in the county, he did not forget the friends he had known and esteemed in his humbler days, and many were the pleasant days that both Dr. Grey and I spent at Newton Priors.

Though Basil had long ceased to talk to me of Agnes Nesbit (Vavasour), I felt sure he still cherished a constant and romantic attachment for her, and clung to the memory of their youthful love. I do not think that Miss Egerton had ever heard the name of Agnes Nesbit. The

family had ceased to be long before her time, and there was no one she knew, except myself, to tell the tale. But brief as had been the period of that love, and unfortunate its conclusion, I felt sure it had never been forgotten by him, and when people wondered that Basil Egerton did not marry, I often felt as if I alone could tell the reason why.

Some few years before the break up of the old family, and the succession of Basil Egerton to the property, a rumour had reached Castleford, which was subsequently confirmed, that great trouble had befallen the Vavasours in India. I am not competent to speak of Indian affairs, knowing so little about them, and might make some egregious blunder if I attempted to detail the story of ruin and disgrace that had fallen on the unfortunate man. It was something connected with native affairs in a very high quarter, and the only thing actually present to my recollection

is that Mr. Vavasour lost his high post, that he failed in a great money speculation, and that he and his wife had retired to some distant province, where he had still sufficient interest to secure a small place that brought him in at least a sufficiency for all they required, and, as they had no family, they contrived to get on tolerably well. They were both contented to remain where they were, for Mr. Vavasour could not brook the idea of returning to England in such different circumstances from those he had looked forward to enjoying when he should bring his wife back to her native place.

I never heard from Agnes after their misfortune. Old Captain Allen told us the report was quite true, and had been confirmed by an Indian correspondent of his own; after that no more was heard of the unfortunate Vavasours, and as old Captain Allen died the following year, that source of casual information was lost.

Towards the end of the month of July in the year I speak of, Mr. Egerton issued cards for an out-door party and dance, in honour of his cousin Mary's birthday; we were amongst the invited guests, and everything was to be done in the most perfect style both in the house and in the beautiful garden and grounds. There was an immense gathering of all the county, and most of the inhabitants of the town of Castleford were invited. I forgot to mention that Basil Egerton was our popular member on the Conservative side at that time, which no doubt caused a larger number of invitations to be issued than might otherwise have been the case. He had left everything to be done by experienced hands, whom he sent down from town, where he was at that time residing for the parliamentary season, only coming occasionally to Newton Priors for a day or two.

Mrs. and Miss Egerton were, as I have said, resident there, and had *carte blanche*

to order anything and invite anyone according to their fancy; and although the gaiety must have been contrary to her inclination, Mrs. Egerton lent herself to the occasion, on her daughter's account, though with a great mixture of feeling. But she was a strong-minded woman, and what she thought it right or expedient to do, that she did, let it be ever so painful.

Mary was young enough, and sufficiently in love with the master of the house, and giver of the entertainment devised in her honour, to put every feeling aside except those of pleasure and gratification.

It was a lovely evening, or rather afternoon, about five or six o'clock, when the guests began to arrive. Mary met me in the hall, for as an old friend of her cousin Basil's I was always, to her, a welcome guest.

Her mother remained in the large saloon, and received such visitors there as preferred looking at the fine collection of pictures in the gallery, and other curiosities of the

mansion, to the more popular amusements of the gardens and grounds. Mary was looking extremely pretty, and a deeper pleasure than that derived from the fête shone in her clear brown eyes, as she said,

"Basil is only just come. He says he has been detained in town till late this afternoon, and he desired me to tell you to be so good as to wait for him here; he has something particular to say to you."

I promised to remain, and Mary flitted away. There could be no doubt, I thought, that the place she then filled in receiving her cousin's guests would ere long be hers by right—as his wife. She looked the part already, and I could never believe that a "memory" alone could keep her from the place she was so well calculated to adorn. I sauntered about the large, cool, spacious hall, where Mary Egerton had detained me, and was well amused with watching the groups of people as they arrived, and dispersed, some within and some without

the house. There were also beautiful stands of rare flowers, besides the pictures which covered the walls, to admire and engross my attention.

I had not long to wait for the appearance of the master of the house, I was struck, the instant I saw him, with the unwonted brightness of his whole aspect. I felt sure something of happy moment must have befallen him, and then I reverted in thought to the glad light that shone in Mary Egerton's dark eyes, and I felt as if both sprang from the same cause. Surely Basil Egerton was going to tell me of his engagement to his charming cousin. I hardly needed the preface he made to his communication, as he offered me his arm, and leaving the house, turned down immediately into a quiet, sheltered walk, little frequented by the guests of the day —he said,

"I have such good news for you that I could not wait the chance of meeting you

in a crowd in the grounds, so I asked Mary to keep you in the hall till I could have the pleasure of seeing you, and it is very good of you to have waited for me."

My only response was to assure my old friend that I was very ready to wait, and delighted to hear it was to receive pleasant tidings; but I could very easily divine what his news was. Mr. Egerton turned quickly towards me when I said that, looking eagerly in my face, at the same time saying,

"Impossible!"

"I daresay you think I have neither eyes to see nor ears to hear, nor an understanding to conceive what has been present to my imagination for some time," said I.

"Not unless you are a witch, dear Mrs. Grey, to see the invisible and hear the inaudible. I say nothing as to the extent of your imagination—of course I can place no limits to that."

"Well," I replied, "I think it requires

no wonderful stretch of imagination to fancy that——"

"Well, fancy what?" said my pertinacious host.

I answered boldly—

"Well, that at last you have found your destined bride."

"*Right!*" returned Basil, emphatically—"you are quite right. Thank heaven, at last I have!"

"Yes, and in your sweet cousin Mary."

"No, you are mistaken there. Mary is a dear girl, and a charming cousin, or sister, but too young for me. Listen, what happiness do you think is yet in store for me? I feel sure you will rejoice more than anyone else I know when I tell you my glad, joyful tidings. Agnes is returned!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was strange that the possibility of such an event had never before occurred to my active imagination. Had Basil Egerton, then, been waiting all those weary years on the bare chance of such an event as that of Agnes returning a widow to England? I hardly knew what to say, or in what form to shape my congratulations, till I knew more, so I quietly observed—

"Then I suppose you have seen her?"

"No, not yet, but I have had a line from her. It was a strange chance that brought me acquainted with the fact of her return to England. I had never heard a word of or from her before, and was

totally ignorant that her—that Mr. Vavasour was dead."

Basil then went on to tell me that he had accidentally met a man in London with whom he had been very intimate some years back, that he was only just returned from India, "and from what he told me," said Basil, "I found that Agnes had been a fellow-passenger, my friend observing, 'By the way, one of the lady passengers informed me she came from Castleford, in ——shire. I told her that I had a friend living near that town, and when your name was mentioned, the said lady became eloquent in your praise, and said she had known you many years ago, but had long lost sight of you. She seemed charmed to hear of your good fortune, and agreed with me that you deserved it.' My friend also remarked that the lady had been personally unknown to him till the day they happened to engage in this conversation, adding, 'But a friend of

mine in the same ship who introduced us told me he had formerly been acquainted with the lady and her husband in India, the latter being since dead. They were a Mr. and Mrs. Vavasour; he had been very unfortunate, and had got into some dreadful mess with Government, and had to relinquish a very lucrative post, and had lived in obscurity ever since. Mrs. Vavasour had the reputation of being a great beauty when she first appeared in India, and—and——'"

Mr. Egerton hesitated a little as he recounted his friend's speech, and seemed disinclined to finish it, so I asked—

"Did your friend say whether Agnes was altered since those days?"

"How should he tell? he did not know her till later," was the somewhat brusque reply; then Basil remarked, in a more genial tone—"I see what you think, dear Mrs. Grey, and no doubt I *shall* find my Agnes a little altered, as she will find me."

"Well, if she is not more altered than

you are, Mr. Egerton, I think you will have every reason to be satisfied."

"Satisfied! Ah! if you could tell the nature of the feeling I still entertain for Agnes, you would know that no change which any number of years can have made in that dear face and form can in any way detract from my love and admiration. She will always be *Agnes* to me, the one woman on earth I care to make my wife!"

"Well, I hope we shall find our dear Agnes the same in disposition, whatever alteration there may be personally. We all know that her lovely complexion cannot be expected to have remained the same after fifteen years' wear and tear of Indian climate. But pray tell me where you found her, and all about everything that has happened?"

"I found out where she was in London from my friend, who told me Mrs. Vavasour had asked him to recommend some cheap inn or lodging for her to rest a few days,

before she started for her native town, which she was anxious to visit, and see some old friends there."

"Then how did you miss seeing her?"

"It was only yesterday morning I met my friend, and I did not find the house she was staying at till this morning, as she had moved from the inn she went to from the ship. I went immediately to the place I was told of by the people at the inn, but found, when I got there, she was out. I had come provided with a short note, in case of such a contretemps, and left it with my card. I was obliged to come down for Mary's fête this afternoon, but propose running up again to-morrow. Just before I left my rooms in town to-day I received a note in answer to mine. It is very short, but entirely to the purpose."

Basil put the note into my hand, it contained a scrap of paper, which he took out as he gave me Agnes's note to read. It said:—

"DEAR BASIL,

"How good of you to seek me, and to remember old times. I have not forgotten them either, as you will see by the enclosed.

"Yours ever,

"AGNES VAVASOUR."

"And the enclosed?" I asked.

"Ah! that was a little scrap I gave her, the last evening we passed together. I told her then that no one but 'Agnes' should ever be 'Basil's bride!'"

"And Agnes has sent you that reminder already?" said I, wondering, for I remembered the girl's delicate feeling on all such subjects, and intimate as they might have been in their youth, how could she tell that Basil's feelings towards her, so long a wife, and now a widow, should be the same as in her early girlhood?

Basil seemed to penetrate some of my thoughts, as he replied to them—

"It was no 'reminder,' only an answer to my urgent appeal in my note as to whether *she* was the same Agnes, even as I remained to her the same Basil of so many years ago."

I believe that Mr. Egerton would have remained talking to me all that evening about past pleasures and pains, and anticipations of coming happiness, regardless of his duties of host, had I not reminded him of them.

I felt saddened after this interview, and could think of nothing else. The sight of Mary Egerton's sweet, happy, unconscious face gave me pain. I saw how constantly her looks turned to her cousin, and felt sure that, in her innocent heart, she believed that he was, like herself, perfectly happy because they were together. Poor Mary! how soon the waking hour from that fond dream must come, and, I knew, come when it would be a very bitter trial.

Then how greatly I wondered what my

old friend Agnes would be like; her readiness to remind her old lover of his early promise did not look well. Surely she must have passed through some deteriorating period in her married life of so many years. She must have lost the delicate bloom of her feelings, as well as of her complexion, by this time; and then I reproached myself with disloyalty to the friend I had loved so well in her girlhood.

That bright evening passed quickly away. The dance that succeeded the garden-party took place in the house; it began early and ended late. There was a sumptuous banquet, which did duty both as late dinner and early supper. It was a charming entertainment, and the donor of it seemed the happiest of all. I left with some sad forebodings in my heart. I knew that deep, sorrowful disappointment awaited both Mary and her fond mother, and at the same time I rather feared that disappointment in another form would be the

portion of Basil Egerton. He put me into the carriage, and whispered,

"I return early to London to meet my Agnes to-morrow. I shall persuade her to visit, not me, but my aunt here, and as soon as etiquette permits, I shall take her away again as—my bride!"

It seemed a strange position of affairs, and I felt much for Mrs. Egerton in having to welcome the coming stranger to take her place at Newton Priors, instead of her daughter, as once appeared so likely.

A week passed away, and I heard and saw nothing of the Egerton family; but it often happened that a longer period elapsed without our meeting, and I felt sure that Basil, in the delight of his restoration to Agnes's society, could think of no one but her. At length a note came from Mrs. Egerton, asking Dr. Grey and myself to dine with them the following day, and to come early, as she wanted to have a little chat with me before dinner.

My husband was otherwise engaged, so I drove myself over in our little pony-carriage, and was shown up into Mrs. Egerton's own morning-room, as it was too early to assemble in the drawing-room before dinner. The dear old lady received me very kindly. There was a sorrowful look in her kind dark eyes, which were like her daughter's. She began at once to speak on the subject nearest her heart.

"You know this strange lady, I understand, Mrs. Grey. I never saw Miss Nesbit, for we did not visit them, but heard of her when Basil first went to Mr. Nesbit's, though I never knew that an engagement had existed between them before her marriage with that rich Indian, Mr. Vavasour. Of course it would in those days have been a very eligible match for Basil—before Mr. Nesbit failed—and we cannot blame him now for his constancy; but I confess I should have liked him to have married one of our county young ladies, and not

this stranger widow, who must be five or six and thirty, at least."—Mrs. Egerton would not for the world have hinted at her disappointment that her own beloved child was passed over; she continued—"I have asked the favour of your coming here to-day to meet Mrs. Vavasour. Basil escorts her down this evening, and it is rather an awkward part that Mary and I have to play in receiving her as a guest, under the circumstances, so I felt sure you would come and help us."

I felt it was indeed an awkward, and, more than that, trying position to the sweet old lady who had so long and so gracefully presided over that stately home —and for her daughter! Well, I pitied her from my heart! Then I remembered my old friendship with Agnes, and tried to rekindle some of its former fire and force, but there seemed nothing but dead ashes in my heart, and I felt ashamed of the inexplicable dislike I felt to the idea

of her coming to that house as "Basil's bride."

However, the time passed away, and Mrs. Egerton and I left her boudoir for the drawing-room, to be in readiness to receive the travellers; the carriage was to meet them at the railway station, Basil driving his open phaeton, and the light luggage cart was sent for Mrs. Vavasour's maid and packages. I was rather surprised to hear of the attendant, considering Agnes's circumstances, but supposed that Basil had considered it necessary for her to be so accompanied.

Mary was also in waiting for the travellers; she greeted me with studied cheerfulness, but the beautiful, happy light had faded out of her now sad eyes; she looked very pale and nervous, and talked incessantly of everything but that which was uppermost in her mind. At last we heard the grinding of wheels on the gravel, as the carriage drew up before the massive

hall door. The groom jumped down from his seat behind, and the deep-toned door-bell clanged its loud summons through the house. I saw Mary grow deadly pale, and press her hand for a moment on her heart, as if to stop its rebellious throbbings.

Mrs. Egerton rose calm and stately from her chair, and advanced towards the door to meet her nephew and his affianced bride. I cast a hasty glance from one to the other. Basil's countenance was calm and self-possessed, but exhibited none of that exultant gladness that was depicted on it when I saw him last. He advanced first into the room, then, turning to the lady who accompanied him, only said,

"My aunt—Mrs. Vavasour."

The lady came slowly forward, but difficult indeed would it have been to recognise the slim, graceful figure of Agnes Nesbit under the portly one of the lady who languidly approached and took the hand Mrs. Egerton extended, saying,

"Thank you—quite well—tired rather—long journey—glad to rest."

Then the same ceremony was repeated with Mary, but Agnes's eyes dwelt on her fair face with a longer scrutiny as she said,

"Glad to see you. Basil told me you were here; he is so good, so kind to everyone."

Then Mrs. Egerton came forward, and observed—

"But here is some one you *do* know; our old friend Mrs. Grey is kindly come to welcome you."

Of course, I could only put on a smiling countenance, and say,

"You must have forgotten *me* by this time, Agnes, and I should hardly have known *you*, if I had not been told you were expected to-day."

Very true was that observation on my part, for although I recognised in Mrs. Vavasour a sort of family resemblance to

her former self, all actual traces of the Agnes I had known and loved were effaced. She was grown large and coarse, with a strong resemblance to Mr. Nesbit; her once fair, beautiful complexion had turned into sallow paleness; her eyes, so bright and tender, were half closed by the heavy cheeks, which had usurped the greater part of her face; her fair hair, still bright and abundant, though a shade or two darker than of old, was the only thing about her on which time had not laid a devastating hand.

"Agnes is very tired; she has not got over her long voyage yet, and the railway journey to-day has quite upset her," said Mr. Egerton, with a proper show of anxiety, more audible in his words than visible in his countenance.

Mrs. Vavasour looked up at him with a languishing glance, and said,

"You are always too anxious about me, dearest; let me see my own room, and

send Pauline, and I shall soon be ready for dinner—that is, if it is ready for me" (with a slight attempt at a laugh); "and, indeed, I hope it is, for I am dreadfully faint and hungry."

This unsentimental speech was received in silence by her lover, and with surprised looks by the two ladies, but to me it accounted for much of the change that I perceived in Mrs. Vavasour. She had become a *gourmande*, and as such had, as an inevitable consequence, combined with her indolence, increased in size so amazingly.

Mrs. Egerton rang the bell for Mrs. Vavasour's maid, whilst that lady replied to my little speech of welcome.

"Ah, dear Mrs. Grey, I am very glad indeed to see you again, and remember you quite well. I shall hope often to see you here after Mr. Egerton and I are comfortably settled for good."

I did not dare glance at the bridegroom elect as his future wife made her little

speeches to us all. I felt how he must be regretting his precipitancy in re-offering himself to a woman after fifteen years' absence, and without having seen her.

The dinner passed over in spasmodic attempts on the part of the master of the house to talk, and on that of his guests to keep up the ball of conversation. Mrs. Vavasour was the least discomposed of the whole party; she evidently enjoyed her dinner, and called for pale ale, and quaffed it with avidity, not despising the wines that were handed round. She looked about with evident appreciation of all the luxury that surrounded her. When Mrs. Egerton rose, I believe she would willingly have remained behind with her betrothed, but I heard him say,

"I am coming directly, Agnes. I never sit long after dinner, but I am going to speak to my steward, so please go with my aunt."

Mrs. Vavasour, thus dismissed, rolled

slowly out of the room, then, placing herself in a comfortable recumbent position on a sofa in the drawing-room, was soon fast asleep. Mrs. Egerton looked towards the intended wife of her nephew, and whispered to me,

"It is like a hideous nightmare!—he never *can* love or marry such a woman!"

"And yet," I replied, "she was a very charming girl."

"Yes, that might have been, when she was quite young, but she comes of low parentage, and now she is older her want of good breeding shows itself. No doubt the secluded, self-indulgent life she has led for fifteen years in India has contributed to make her what she is; but ah! is there no help or rescue for my ill-fated nephew? Must this underbred, coarse woman take her place as mistress of this dear old time-honoured home?"

Mary rose and went to her mother as the old lady raised her voice in her trouble,

and persuaded her to go to her own room, accompanying and remaining with her there; and as Basil entered the room just then, I ordered my pony-carriage, and was glad to drive home without farther delay.

CHAPTER IX.

I HAVE often thought, in the course of my long life, that there is generally more pain than pleasure in meeting old friends after a long separation, and in this case it was positively appalling to see the change that time had wrought in my old school-friend. It was the mental more than the personal alteration that I lamented so deeply as I thought what must be the effect on the family of which she was so soon to become a member, most especially on Basil Egerton himself.

These queries were in some measure answered when, a few days after, he rode up to our house, and came in, as he said, for a few minutes' chat. I was rather

surprised to see him, as I fancied he had intended returning to London after he had settled Mrs. Vavasour in his house as a visitor to his aunt and cousin. This I said to Mr. Egerton soon after he came in.

"Yes," said he, "I did intend leaving Mrs. Vava—Agnes at home, and only making occasional visits there myself. I thought, too, that, situated as we are, she might prefer it, but I found it would not do in any way. Agnes cried, and said, after our long separation, she could not bear to lose sight of me, and my aunt declared she would not be left alone with Mrs. Vavasour."

"And what does your cousin Mary say?" I asked.

"Ah! Mary, dear, good little Mary! She really behaves more like an angel than a woman! She tries to make the best of a bad business, and to keep peace, and reconcile every person and thing—God bless her!—but it is difficult enough!"

"I am sorry you find it so already. What will you do with half your life before you?"

"Heaven knows! I am sure I do not," said Basil, with a weary sigh, as he threw himself into a chair, and took off his gloves despondingly.

I said nothing, but no doubt thought the more; it seemed so terrible to me, the sacrifice he was about to make to a phantasy. Mr. Egerton looked up after a pause, and said,

"You were grievously surprised, and disappointed, too, in your old friend?"

I replied—"I simply could not have believed it possible. But surely Mrs. Vavasour must be in some degree aware of the great change that has taken place in herself in every way since you parted, and would not wish to hold you to a promise which she, in fact, cancelled when she married Mr. Vavasour."

"I do not know—I have never asked

her—and, poor girl, she loves me as fondly as ever! She wears our engagement ring still, and says it has never left her finger. So sometimes I think 'we may be happy yet,' and at others I loathe my unlucky destiny, and the rash blindness with which I rushed upon my fate, without caring to see whither it was leading me. Yes, Mrs. Vavasour fully understood me to have renewed my former offer, and she as unequivocally has accepted it. Well, we must make the best of it now, the step seems irrevocable."

I could give no comfort in the miserable case. Neither did I see what could be done whilst Agnes chose to hold her unwilling lover to his promise. I went over soon after, at Mr. Egerton's request, and Dr. Grey went with me. It was August then, a hot, close day, the windows were all open, and the three ladies were in the drawing-room. Mrs. Vavasour, as usual, was reclining on the most luxurious sofa in the

room, and a little in the shadow cast by the Venetian shutters, which were partly closed.

It was not long after luncheon, and Mrs. Vavasour generally indulged in a prolonged siesta after her "tiffin," as she always called it. I only wondered she did not retire to the more undisturbed seclusion of her own shady and luxurious apartment; but Mrs. Egerton told me she always stayed downstairs to waylay Basil, and to make him either sit by her sofa, or indulge her with a saunter in the shade, or any lover-like attentions she could extort from him.

Mr. Egerton was not visible when we first went into the room, we were told he had gone to the stables after luncheon, declining Mrs. Vavasour's offer of accompanying him. Dr. Grey left the room to go and look for him, but first advanced to the sofa of the recumbent lady, saying,

"I think we are old acquaintances, Mrs. Vavasour?"

"Oh! yes, Dr. Grey, in poor papa's time! I remember you and Mrs. Grey very well. But we all change so terribly in the course of time that it is difficult to know old friends again. I am sure I should not have remembered you, nor you me, I daresay."

"Well, I hardly know; you are too much in the shade there for me to tell, but perhaps we shall remember each other better by-and-by."

And then my husband went out, and Mary came to the rescue, and tried to help us two old friends to keep up anything like a conversation. I wondered at her self-possession and entire forgetfulness of self, and then a pang came across my mind as I remembered how Agnes in her youth had been distinguished for every quality that now made Mary so charming. Was it possible that that gentle girl could ever under any circumstances change as Agnes had done? Then I tried to bring

back something of my old feeling for Agnes by talking to her of our early days, and things that had happened at school together, and to old school friends; but Mrs. Vavasour seemed disinclined to keep up the conversation, or to encourage my reminiscences of former days.

It was weary work altogether, and I was very glad when the two gentlemen made their appearance, hoping for a little diversion to our dulness. Mrs. Vavasour lifted her head with something like animation as she heard Mr. Egerton's voice, and called him to her side, saying,

"Oh, Basil, dearest, pray come here and talk for me to Mrs. Grey. I am so stupid, I seem to forget everything she has been telling me the last half hour—perhaps you may remember better."

"Hardly, I think," said I, laughing, "as Mr. Egerton, though a very good friend, was never at school with me, as you were."

"Oh, yes, to be sure—I forgot that."

Then, as Mrs. Vavasour had got her poor victim Basil to entertain her, as well as my husband, I took advantage of Mary Egerton's offer of walking round the conservatories, and we accordingly made our way thither, talking as we went of anything but what we were both thinking about. At last, as I remarked on the beauty and variety of rare plants in one of the houses, Mary exclaimed, as if unwittingly—

"And to think that all these lovely things will be *hers!* Oh! if Mrs. Vavasour were but more worthy of my cousin and our old home, I would not grudge them to her—but how can I help it as things are?"

"How indeed!" I replied. "And is everything quite settled?"

"Quite," said Mary. "They are to be married the beginning of next month, when Mrs. Vavasour's year of widowhood is expired, and Basil has given her *carte*

blanche as to her *trousseau* and everything else. Oh, if she were but better fitted to make him happy!"

"I hear she is still much attached to him," said I, by way of panacea.

"Yes, in a way, I believe, she is; but I fear all his former love for her is quite extinct. I see he tries sometimes to revive it, but it is evident what an effort it costs him to play the part. She must see it, but she holds him to his promise, and in such a woman as that how can we wonder, when there is every inducement to do so?"

"Yes, and this lovely place must be a strong argument in favour of her determination."

"Oh! Mrs. Grey," said poor Mary, shuddering, "you can never fancy the torture it is to see her airs of appropriation of all the dear home things, and to hear her talk of what she means to do here when they return from their wedding excursion, and

mamma and I are gone to our cottage! It is enough to kill poor dear Basil!"

And then Mary fairly broke down, and cried bitterly. After she recovered we went back, and I found Dr. Grey ready to take me home. I was amused, whilst the carriage was coming round, to observe how wrapped up he seemed to be in his observation of Mrs. Vavasour; he stood a little behind the head of her sofa, intently listening to her conversation, as she grew lively and playful with her betrothed, and observing every action. As we drove away from the door, I said,

"Well, I think you were quite fascinated with Mrs. Vavasour, you watched her so closely. Do you see anything to remind you of our old friend Agnes?"

"No," said he, "but I do of her cousin Fanny," adding, by way of explanation, "I once attended her professionally, when living at her uncle's, and I never forget the

cast of a patient's countenance, however greatly the features and complexion may alter, and I am quite convinced the *soi-disant* Mrs. Vavasour was Fanny Nesbit."

"Fanny!" I exclaimed, in boundless astonishment, which may be better conceived than expressed. "Why, Fanny died in India, not long after her marriage, which was a very miserable one."

"Mrs. Vavasour has probably told you so?" questioned my husband.

"Yes—very briefly. I asked after Fanny, and Mrs. Vavasour seemed a good deal upset by my inquiry, but gave me to understand that the subject was a very painful one, as Fanny's marriage had been most unhappy, and her death followed shortly upon it; and she begged me to say no more, as she could not bear to talk upon the subject."

"No doubt it was a delicate and difficult one for her to manage, so she did well to dismiss all present and future discussion

upon it. So you of course believed every word she told you ?"

"Why, she told me very little, only the bare facts, which I have related, and which she sobbed out from behind her pocket-handkerchief."

"Which conveniently hid her face whilst she was making her monstrous statement !"

"But," I persisted, "I cannot in any way see—much as I should rejoice to do so—that Mrs. Vavasour *can* be any other than the Agnes we knew so well, and find so changed, for you must remember that Mr. Egerton's friend, or rather his friend's friend, knew both Mr. and Mrs. Vavasour very well in India, and had done so till within a short time before Mr. Vavasour's death, and that he recognized his widow, and came over in the same ship with her. Having seen Agnes and her husband so lately together, there could be no mistake as to identity ; and then the engagement ring that Mr. Egerton gave Agnes, and the

paper with his promise, which she returned to him, and (about which there could be no mistake) all point to the fact, I fear, that the present inmate of Newton Priors, and the betrothed bride of its master, can be no other than the Agnes he so dearly loved —and lost."

Dr. Grey pondered over my words, and admitted that there were great difficulties in the way, but continued firm to his belief that the lady who claimed the coveted position of "Basil's bride" was no other than the former Fanny Nesbit.

Under that strong impression of my husband's my own understanding became enlarged and my vision quickened, so that in my next visit to Newton Priors I saw many things which tended to confirm Dr. Grey's suspicions, and these induced him to go over occasionally, in the hope of eliciting something which might serve to bring about a blessed deliverance to our poor friend.

We said nothing, however, to him, but Dr. Grey caused diligent inquiries to be made amongst friends of his in London and elsewhere, who had Indian acquaintances. We dared not utter a word, however, till something should authorise us to speak on so delicate a subject.

Meanwhile time went on, and the dreaded wedding-day drew near. Basil made occasional absences at that time, on the plea of business connected with his approaching marriage, and it was with some difficulty he persuaded his *fiancée* to remain quiet on those occasions, and forego her wish, so persistently proclaimed, of accompanying him to London. But this Mr. Egerton calmly and decidedly negatived.

One reason for the urgency of her request I imagined might be attributed to the extreme dislike she felt to being left alone with the two ladies of the house; and I could see she also disliked being ex-

posed to the scrutiny of Dr. Grey, who sometimes called when Mr. Egerton was away, and never failed to engage Mrs. Vavasour in conversation that led to past times and experiences.

She would, however, talk to me occasionally of those by-gone days, but there was nothing in those reminiscences that concerned one cousin more than the other—and she generally avoided anything of a particularly personal nature, though she seldom failed to dwell on the love that had existed between herself and Basil Egerton in those days of happy intercourse.

There were times, I confess, when my faith in my husband's sagacity was somewhat shaken, and I felt as though I halted between two opinions. Perhaps one reason may have been that Mrs. Vavasour was in some respects improved since her first arrival, and I saw she roused herself out of many of her indolent Indian ways and habits; she also began to dress in good

taste, regardless of expense, and leaving off all traces of widowhood, her still beautiful hair was perfectly arranged by her French maid. Still, with all these advantages, she failed to win back the love she claimed, and Basil's eye would pass coldly over her to the place where Mary sat in her simple dress, and her glossy dark hair carelessly gathered up in a large knot, leaving the open brow and sweet face fully exposed to view.

Sometimes I could discern a rising flush on Mrs. Vavasour's sallow cheek, as her gaze followed that of her betrothed, and she impatiently endeavoured to concentrate his attention on herself.

It was the week before the wedding (which, from various causes, principally, I believe, arising from lawyers' delays—and which were in no degree accelerated by Mr. Egerton's endeavours), and he was still absent. He had been called on urgent business to London, but was expected back

in a day or two. I had been asked to join the family party, as my husband was also from home. The invitation came from Mrs. Egerton. She did not relinquish one atom of her privileges as mistress of her nephew's house. Her quiet dignity was more than a match for Mrs. Vavasour's pretentious self-importance.

Dr. Grey had heard nothing in confirmation of his surmises, or to strengthen his suspicions, everything (and that was little enough, owing to the great retirement in which Mr. Vavasour lived after his reverses), on the contrary, pointed the other way. Basil's friend, who had been applied to, certified that his friend was positive as to the fact of the lady he came home with from India being the widow of Mr. Vavasour, and with whom he was well acquainted as his wife—and, further, he knew her to have been a Miss Nesbit. I therefore came reluctantly to the conclusion that there was no deception in the case,

but that Basil's intended bride was the veritable Agnes he had chosen in the bright days of her youth, and who was now so lamentably altered.

Still Dr. Grey refused to yield up his strong conviction to the contrary; he said he had never yet been mistaken in a question of identity, and would not give in an inch. In vain I reminded him of the likeness of the two cousins when girls, and still more of the striking resemblance of Mrs. Vavasour to Mr. Nesbit—"her father."

"Her uncle, you mean," interposed Dr. Grey; adding, "You forget Mr. Nesbit had a brother as like him as if they had been twins, and that man was Fanny's father."

Whether it was really Agnes or Fanny, there seemed no help for it, and Basil appeared fated to be the unwilling victim of one or the other.

I have said I was at Newton Priors, Dr. Grey being absent. As the time drew

so near he could no longer keep silence, and in strict confidence he one day imparted his suspicions to Mr. Egerton. This idea, which had never distantly occurred to Basil, seemed to bring fresh life into his wearied existence, but his spirits sank after a while, as the improbability of the truth of such a surmise being proved came over his mind, for, changed as she was, there could be no shadow of doubt that the lady he was about to marry was the veritable widow of Mr. Vavasour, and the same Mr. Vavasour we had all known so well at Castleford. His history, public and private, as well as his person, were too well known by all who could be interrogated to admit of any doubt being entertained on that subject.

It happened at that time Dr. Grey went to London to visit an old patient who had been long absent. This gentleman was a native of Castleford, and though Dr. Grey had lost sight of him for several

years, yet when he wrote begging him to visit him professionally in London, saying he was just returned from India, he went without a moment's delay, inspired by some vague hope that he might yet be able to gain tidings that might save his friend from his impending fate.

"India's a wide place," said I to him, as we parted, "and your friend (whom I remember very well) may never have come across the path of Mr. Vavasour and Agnes."

"He may not—but people whom he knew there might have done so, and as he is a Castleford man, he may have been interested to hear of Vavasour and his wife Agnes. Depend upon it I will leave no stone unturned to find out the mystery."

Thus firm in hope and expectation he departed, and I went to Mrs. Egerton and Mary. Basil was not gone or going the day I arrived, so I had ample time for observing and deploring the miserable

state of affairs in that beautiful home. The hope that Basil had indulged, when Dr. Grey first talked to him on the subject, had gradually declined and died out. He looked harassed and unhappy, and it seemed wonderful how any woman could persist in holding so unwilling a captive to his promise. Mrs. Vavasour appeared to ignore all the misery around her, or, if she observed it, to lay it to the account of Mrs. Egerton and Mary. She said to me when I arrived :

"I am so glad to see you! We are so dull and doleful here! The dear aunt and her little daughter can't bear leaving these pleasant quarters, and are quite angry with me, and spiteful, and envious of my coming happiness. Really they make poor dear Basil almost as dolorous as themselves. It will be a blessed deliverance for him and me too when the happy day comes that sees them depart."

Then, after a time, seeing I said nothing, she returned to the subject, observing that it was very evident Mary Egerton worshipped her cousin, and could not forgive his caring more for his former love than for her foolish little insignificant self.

Mr. Egerton, on his part, did all that duty required of him; he was true to his plighted word, though he had lost all love for the woman who claimed his devotion; it was a sacrifice to honour, and it became still harder, as I could see his cousin Mary became dearer every day. He had announced his intention of going to London, and Mrs. Vavasour chose to interpret that movement as a sign of his impatience to get all ready for the coming event.

There was no doubt that Mrs. Vavasour was, in her way, deeply in love with Mr. Egerton, and this fact, instead of making the situation better, only served to render it more irksome to the doomed man. On the morning of his departure she hung

about him, uttering a thousand follies, with many injunctions to "take care of himself," ending with an audible whisper of

"Our last parting, my dearest! When we are once united, I shall never, I think, let you out of my sight!"

"A terrible menace," thought I to myself, as I saw the wretched Basil free himself from her clinging arms, and coldly touch her cheek, as in duty bound, whilst he held out his hand to Mary, grasping hers in a clasp that brought the bright colour into her pale face.

Mr. Egerton left home that day just as the letter-bag was brought in, so he took his own letters to read on the way, and left the rest to their various claimants. Amongst them I was glad to see one from my husband, which was unexpected, as he had only left the preceding day. I saw one also directed in his hand to Mr. Egerton, but as he placed it with the others in his pocket, I heard nothing of its contents.

Mine opened with a paragraph that was apparently the whole and sole cause of the letter being written at all—it said:

"Rejoice!—my hopes run high! You shall hear more in a day or two. I have written to Mr. Egerton."

A day or two, however, passed, and we neither saw nor heard anything more. On the fourth day, as there were still no letters from either of the absent gentlemen, Mrs. Vavasour began to make a considerable disturbance, expressing violent anxiety, and declaring she should go up to London and see after her beloved Basil. She was sure something must have happened, and they feared to tell her; but nothing should keep her from his side if he was sick and suffering. She worked herself into a state of great excitement, and seemed bent on going up to town to seek her absent lover.

Neither Mrs. Egerton nor Mary proffered an opinion, or a word of advice, nor did

they care to interfere with her proceedings, so she began to make her arrangements for departure, and requested that the carriage might be in readiness to take her to the station, that she might proceed to London by an afternoon train. But whilst we sat at luncheon the door suddenly opened, and Dr. Grey walked in. Mrs. Vavasour had risen eagerly as she heard a masculine voice speaking from the door, but seeing it was not the master of the house, she could not control her angry disappointment, and vented it on my husband, exclaiming,

"Only you, Dr. Grey? Where is my—where is Basil? Really it is very hard that you should have come instead of Mr. Egerton; but perhaps you will tell me where he is? I am going to his club to inquire after him."

Dr. Grey looked very calmly in her excited face, and then said, gravely,

"You had better spare yourself the

trouble, Mrs. Vavasour. Let me beg of you to alter your intention."

His calm voice acted like oil on the flame of her indignation, and she grew crimson with passion, as she stamped her foot, and exclaimed,

"You are much mistaken if you think you can separate us. I know you wish to do so, but you will not succeed. Basil Egerton has sworn that no one shall be his bride but me. But this is folly," she continued, contemptuously, turning to leave the room. "I am *almost* Mr. Egerton's wife, and as such, have every right to go and see him."

"I fear, Madam," said Dr. Grey, with cool politeness, "that you will find it difficult to substantiate the claim you have so strangely put forward. Recollect yourself, Madam, and be warned in time. You had better drop your assumed name of Agnes, and resume that of Fanny Vavasour."

A silence like that of death fell upon us all. The unhappy woman, on hearing these words, gasped out, "It is false!" every vestige of colour forsook her sallow face, and she sank fainting on her chair.

There is no occasion to prolong this miserable woman's story. Dr. Grey had succeeded, by means of his old friend, in searching out a former servant of Mr. and Mrs. Vavasour. We all remembered the man, for he went out with them to India. Through him we learnt that our poor Agnes died soon after the date of her husband's misfortunes, and that Fanny had previously returned a widow to live with her. After a brief period of widowhood, Mr. Vavasour married Fanny, and she then naturally became possessed of poor Agnes's treasured relics of happier days, and was thus enabled to play the part of his first wife when she again became a widow, and the widow of Mr. Vavasour.

I need hardly say how overwhelming

was the disappointment of Fanny Vavasour, when she was obliged to succumb under the flood of evidence brought against her, nor the intense though subdued joy and thankfulness of Mrs. Egerton and her daughter.

There was no occasion then to hurry the miserable woman's departure, she had no defence to make, except that she had always loved Basil Egerton so dearly, and she had no idea of deceiving him, or anyone, till she received his note, thinking she was Agnes, and then, knowing they were so much alike (she little dreamt of her own alteration), the temptation was too strong to be resisted, and so she played her game —with what success we have seen.

Basil Egerton did not return to his home for some months after he had so happily regained his freedom, and Mrs. Egerton and Mary once more breathed freely in their old home, after it was cleared of the unwelcome presence that had lately haunt-

ed it. When Mrs. Vavasour took her departure, all the former brightness of the house returned. But she was not allowed to reap the full punishment of her iniquity, for Dr. Grey was charged by Mr. Egerton with the task of seeing her comfortably established in a home of her own, and with a small yearly income, so as to secure the cousin of his once-loved Agnes against the temptations and privations of poverty.

After Mr. Egerton's return, it was not long before we heard, to our intense satisfaction, that he was engaged to his sweet cousin Mary, and shortly after we attended the ceremony that made her "Basil's bride."

EDITH'S ENGAGEMENT.

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CHAPTER I.

ONE of the principal and handsomest houses in Castleford was occupied by a solicitor in good practice, of the name of Fielding.

Mr. Fielding was a man of good connexion, besides being a clever man of business. Though of more plebeian origin himself, he married, early in life, the daughter of his partner, who was a remarkably handsome woman, and made him, in all respects, an excellent wife.

Mr. Fielding was fortunate, too, in his family. He had several sons and daugh-

ters, all more or less good-looking, and for the most part prosperous in life. When I became the wife of Dr. Grey nearly all the family were grown up and married. The three eldest daughters, handsome girls, had all left the old home for more distant ones of their own, and the sons, with the exception of a boy still at school, were out in the world in various callings and professions.

But all the beauty and charm of sweet girl-life had not entirely deserted the old house when I became most intimately acquainted with it. There was one daughter still left, Edith, much younger than her three sisters, and, to my mind, far more beautiful than any of them. She was on a smaller scale, and less strikingly handsome, perhaps, but with a charm of her own, and a winning loveliness that none of her sisters had ever possessed.

Mrs. Fielding, though proud of Edith, and fond of her as the youngest darling of

her motherly heart, still considered that she was inferior in personal attractions to her elder and much-admired sisters. They all in different degrees resembled herself, and with that likeness to her side of the house, they were also rather deficient in the peculiar grace and refinement that Edith inherited from her father's family. Mr. Fielding often declared she was the exact copy of his mother's picture—that beautiful mother who had died in early youth, and of whom the elderly lawyer could have no distinct recollection, yet he always cherished a romantic admiration and affection for the ideal mother he had never known except on canvas.

I had seen this picture, for the Fielding family lived within ten miles of the old county town, and I fully agreed with the father as to the wonderful resemblance between his youngest daughter and her long since dead ancestress.

It is strange to observe the likenesses

that sometimes capriciously appear between the past and present members of a family, in those who have never met, and are often divided by the lapse of so many years! Surely there must be some strong mysterious link in family idiosyncrasies, which can thus reproduce themselves—showing that the ties and affections which connect the past and present generations can never be entirely dissolved.

That little Edith was a great pet in her own family may easily be imagined, nor was I proof against her many fascinations. We were in the habit of seeing a great deal of her, both in her childhood and as she grew up. I think, however, it was some time before any of Edith's own family realized the fact that the child had become a woman, and was ready to take a woman's part in the concerns of the little world around her. Her brothers all called her "Baby," and her sisters spoke of her "coming out" as an event for which

"Little Edie" must wait an indefinite number of years.

Edith, however, after the manner of spoilt darlings, took the matter into her own hands, remarking to me one day,

"I see in the paper there is to be a grand ball this Easter, and I mean to make mamma take me. I have told papa so."

This was quite a new idea to me, so I replied,

"*You*, Edie!—why, you have never been to a ball in your life. What put it into your head?"

Edith laughed merrily.

"Why, dear Mrs. Grey, don't you know I am past seventeen, and surely that is time to come out?"

"Are you so old? I really beg your pardon, Edie, but I had quite forgotten your last birthday, and I cannot think it happened very long ago."

"Well, perhaps not—about a week or so—but the fact remains the same. I am

seventeen, and old enough to go to all sorts of delightful things."

"What does your mamma say to it?"

"I hardly know; I have not attacked her yet, only papa, and he never says 'no' to me." Then, after a little pause, the dear child came up caressingly to me with, "If mamma should be idle, and does not want to go, but says papa and I may, would you let me go with you?"

Of course I did not refuse on that unlikely proviso, but, happily, my services were not required, as Mrs. Fielding proved quite open to conviction, and though she had rather enjoyed her long rest from the arduous duties of chaperonage, she was quite willing to enter upon them again on little Edie's behalf, though she did say she hoped the dear child would have been satisfied to wait another year—"for she was so very young."

Edith carried her point, and made her first appearance at the Easter ball, where

there was a large assemblage, as the papers had it, of all the beauty and fashion of both town and country. Yes, it was a very nice and good ball, and no one looked prettier or enjoyed it more than our sweet little Edith. Of course she was much admired—anything so young, and fair, and fresh could not fail to bespeak much attention. I do not think, however, that anyone in particular was hopelessly smitten on the occasion, and I am quite sure that Edith only regarded her numerous partners as so many more or less eligible young men to dance with. She was perfectly happy whilst there, and came away quite heart-whole from her first ball.

After that first appearance, Edith went everywhere with her parents; they were popular people, and had plenty of society both in the town and surrounding neighbourhood, so Edith's time was well filled up with various engagements, and she declared she was as happy as the day

was long, and sometimes the *night* too.

The first year passed away. I believe Edith achieved a conquest or two not worth mentioning, and in which her own heart took no part. We had not many of what are called "eligible" young men in our part of the world just then, and most of those possibly looked for higher connection than pretty Edith Fielding, whilst of money it was a patent fact that but a small share could fall to her portion, with the numerous claims of elder brothers and sisters; to say nothing of the liberal way in which it was Mr. and Mrs. Fielding's good pleasure to live and spend their own money, it was impossible they could be laying by much for those who were to succeed them.

Another Easter ball came and went by, *almost* as charming as the first, but there was no denying that a little of the bloom of first impressions was worn off. Edith demanded that her partners should be

pleasant talkers as well as good dancers, and she no longer welcomed all alike. Still she was fancy free; her happy little heart had then known neither care nor trouble, nor had apparently even fancied what might be the delicious dream of a first love, or questioned her own capability as to becoming the subject of such an episode in her own life. She even had remarked to me more than once during that year—possibly it might have had some reference to the rejected suitors I have already mentioned—

"No, I am quite happy at home. I only hope I shall never leave it; and I often wonder that my three sisters cared to go from it so soon, and take upon themselves, whilst so young, all the stupid cares and worries of married life, of which they are now so perpetually complaining to mamma."

"But, Edie," I rejoined, "do not they say anything of the joys and happiness also of their married lives?"

"Oh! no; we take all that for granted. And I am sure, when Matilda and Captain Dalling have to move their quarters, they seem to think their troubles are far greater than the pleasure they enjoy in being together. But I suppose," she added, with a sigh, "that is always the end of all married life."

"Indeed, I hope not, my dear," I remonstrated, rather hastily, for I felt somewhat aggrieved that the silly child should thus air opinions on subjects on which she was so entirely ignorant.

However, we all see things from our own stand-point, and Edith pitied her sisters because they were no longer in their first youth and fresh enjoyment of the amusements in which her foolish little heart delighted.

Nevertheless Edith was not all froth and frivolity even then. She had her serious duties, which she performed in the same earnest spirit in which she entered

into her gaieties—for the time being every occupation, whether grave or gay, engrossed her thoroughly. Thus she visited her favourite poor people, and lavished her little allowance upon their necessities in the most liberal spirit, in spite of the pressing demands of gloves and shoes, which threatened to become serious considerations, in consequence of her inconsiderate generosity. Then she also taught in the school, especially amongst the infants, who doted upon her, and not less on the cakes and sweeties with which she always came provided.

Poor little Edie! it was perhaps a butterfly existence, after all, but it suited her joyous young life, and was as ephemeral as the short-lived Summer-day insect's brief career.

Edith's time came only too soon. It was after her second Easter ball that she made the acquaintance of Edgar Mostyn. He was but lately come to Castleford, and

was Curate to the clergyman who had succeeded my father as Rector. Dr. Grey and I had always kept up a very friendly intercourse with the new comers to the Rectory. I found it painful at first to be visiting at the house which had been so long a happy home to me, and after the honoured master had left it to strangers, when he was taken away from us. However, it was only one amongst the many painful though almost impalpable obligations which crowd around us in our passage through a long life—and as such I lost no time in performing it, and soon forgot the duty in the pleasure.

The longer we hesitate over certain steps that it is incumbent on us to take, the more unwilling do we become to take that *premier pas;* but, in visiting the dear old Rectory, I was well rewarded for my pains, and my husband found a very congenial spirit in the new Rector. He happened to be a single man, and as his house was large, his Curate had the option of

sharing it with him. That is, the Rector gave Mr. Mostyn certain apartments in his house, and the Curate bestowed as much of his time and society on Dr. Temple as they found mutually pleasant.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN we first became acquainted with Dr. Temple, Mr. Mostyn was not his Curate; he did not appear amongst us till after the Rector had been established two or three years, and had won his way in most instances to the hearts of his parishioners.

Dr. Temple had another Curate, whose services he retained after the new one had taken up his abode with him in the old Rectory house. It was generally understood that this proceeding of taking a second Curate arose from motives of friendship, and not of necessity. The Rector was an active man himself, and the senior Curate a remarkably devoted and

hard-working parish priest, and I think Mr. Mason was rather disposed to look upon the introduction of a fellow-worker as an act of supererogation on the part of his pastor and master.

Mr. Edgar Mostyn, we were told, was the second son of a certain Sir Robert Mostyn, a large landed proprietor in a distant county, an old and valued friend of our Rector's; that this second son was, according to the family custom, dedicated to the Church from his birth, the young man's inclinations not being in any way consulted, but solely for the reason that there was a very large family living awaiting the acceptance of the said youth, when he should be old enough to avail himself of such a liberal provision. To my husband the Rector had briefly hinted that the young man was not particularly inclined towards the Church, and that his ideas and feelings on the subject were somewhat unsettled; but he had always been brought

up to consider it as his vocation, that he had a good deal of talent and intellect, and had taken a high degree at college, and was in every way well fitted for the position he was destined to fill; so it was hoped, by placing him as a resident Curate with Dr. Temple, all scruples would be overcome, and his inclination for clerical life assured by seeing it so happily exemplified in the Rector's life.

Thus far we were initiated into the history of Mr. Edgar Mostyn before he made his appearance in Castleford. That event had, however, been delayed for nearly a year after the first announcement of its approach, for Mr. Mostyn had elected to travel for a year after his ordination, and before undertaking his first curacy.

It appeared that Sir Robert Mostyn was a perfect autocrat in his own family, and one whose will had never been called in question; but having gained his point with his younger son (he had but two,

though several daughters), he so far conceded a point as to make Edgar a liberal allowance for travelling expenses, and only stipulated that his absence should not exceed a year. It was at the expiration of this time that Mr. Mostyn came to Dr. Temple's, and entered upon the duties of second Curate in the parish.

At that time Edith Fielding was absent. She was staying with one of her sisters, and, from one cause or another, did not return home till after our acquaintance with Mr. Mostyn had dated some three months back. I cannot say in that time we had made any progress towards friendship, though constantly meeting, both at the Rectory, where my husband and myself were always welcome guests, and also at our own house, which was most sociably frequented by the friendly Rector. Sometimes he came accompanied by his Curate-guest—and occasionally alone; but I think Mr. Mostyn liked talking to Dr. Grey, and

was sure of meeting in his house all the best society the place afforded.

Though the young Curate was peculiarly reserved, there was that perfect ease of a well-bred man in his intercourse with others, which was sure to please. He was also handsome, with refined features and expression, and these personal advantages, as well as the prestige of his future position, won for him golden opinions, at least from all the feminine population of our town. I confess to having been interested in no ordinary degree with our new acquaintance, though, as I have said, we made but little progress in our social intercourse. He appeared to me for the most part to shun women's society. I never saw him talking to girls, even when the brightest and prettiest of our county belles were to be found in the few town houses which they favoured with their presence. He had, besides, the *entrée* of all the neighbouring houses in the country, but seemed to care very little for

the privilege of entering into the society he might find there; he appeared to look with stoical endurance upon life and its pleasures, as if he had but little part amongst them, but had committed himself to the fulfilment of certain duties which, however distasteful to him, he was bound in honour to perform, and thus he wound himself up each weary day to follow out the advice and suggestions of his Rector.

It was at our house that Edith Fielding first met Edgar Mostyn. We happened to be a very small party, only ourselves, an old friend of mine, and Dr. Temple with his new Curate, besides Edith. I had asked two other young people, a brother and sister, friends of Edith's, to join our little dinner-party. Late in the day they sent an excuse, so we were reduced to six. Of course we four elder ones paired off, and the two younger ones were unavoidably thrown together.

Edith was looking very pretty, but paler

than usual. She had heard nothing about our new guest, and no doubt merely looked upon him as Dr. Temple's "second Curate," and perhaps felt that, as a stranger in her native place, she was bound to take the initiative, and make pleasant conversation to the new-comer.

The great charm of Edith's manner was its perfect simplicity, with a natural ease and grace that had its origin in her entire forgetfulness of self, and absence of all consciousness, or any effort to please. It came as naturally to Edith to do so as for a bird to sing, or a bud to unfold. I fancied that Mr. Mostyn felt the genial influence of the tone and manner of his new acquaintance, and that he watched with less of his usual listless endurance for the raising of those long dark lashes and the quick look of intelligence that followed some remarks he addressed to her. I observed a look of interest, and even a rare and pleasant smile lighting up his countenance at

some little quick answer from Edith as their conversation and acquaintance progressed.

When we came into the drawing-room again, my friend Miss Lawrence complimented Edith in having animated the handsome statue, as she was pleased to designate our new Curate, but at the same time remarking she was afraid she found the saturnine young clergyman a very dull companion, after all the gay people and pleasant young officers she must have met when staying with her sister and Captain Dalling. To this observation Edith only replied simply:

"No, I did not find Mr. Mostyn (that is his name, is it not?) at all dull; he talked about his travels in different places, and a great deal about Spain, where he has been spending some months. It was a pleasant change, after hearing so much of military matters for weeks past—not but that I thought it all very nice and gay

when I first went, but one gets tired of the same thing when you hear it morning, noon, and night."

"Ah," returned Miss Lawrence, "a great deal depends upon the person who says the things."

"Indeed," pleaded Edith, "if they all talk in the same way, and on the same subjects, it makes all the talkers alike—at least, I found it so; but nevertheless I was very happy there, though glad to come back."

"Then it is to be hoped, Edith, as you have had enough of balls and reviews, and military movements of various sorts for some time to come, that you will find something else to amuse you here. Perhaps now you will take to school-feasts and concerts, and such quiet clerical recreations, which I daresay your new friend, Mr. Mostyn, would recommend you to patronise."

"Oh, no," rejoined Edith, laughing; "I did try him on that topic at first, and asked if Dr. Temple had given his usual

school treat, but Mr. Mostyn only said he believed he had, though, having forgotten the day and the occasion, he had gone a long ramble into the country; but it did not much signify, as Mr. Mason was there to supply all his deficiencies, and possibly in time he might understand all about such entertainments, if it was needful to give them; and then he went on to speak of village *fêtes* in different countries, and their dances and amusements, and enjoyment of outdoor life, and in that way we got to Spain, and I found travelling there so pleasant that I only came back to this country when Mrs. Grey got up, and we left the dining-room."

I was glad to find, from her careless chatter, that my little friend had found her dinner companion so pleasant, and suspected that the pleasure had not been entirely confined to herself. This idea was strengthened after the gentlemen joined us (which they did very soon), and

Mr. Mostyn went at once and took a vacant seat by Edith, and talked on quietly to her for some time; after that we had music, and she sang some of the touching little ballads her father loved so well, and Mr. Mostyn, in return, gave us a Spanish song or two, and altogether our evening passed quickly and happily away.

Well, that was the first time of meeting, and after that Edith was constantly meeting Mr. Mostyn. I soon saw how it was on her side, for a new light had come into her soft grey eyes, with their beautiful long lashes, and a spirit of deep happiness seemed to settle down upon her whole being. It was the first dawn of love, deep, earnest, and true as ever warmed a girl's pure heart.

I felt very glad for Edith, but at the same time anxious as to the gentleman's sentiments towards her. I was sure Mr. Mostyn liked her extremely, and found

her very superior, or thought she was, to all the other girls he saw at that time. Sometimes I feared that his attentions were more those of a brother than a lover.

Her parents were charmed with what they saw of Mr. Mostyn, for he unbent to them as he did to few others, and they could desire nothing better for their darling than that she should become the wife of Edgar Mostyn. They were aware that a living was waiting for him; it was only held by a friend of the family till he should be able to claim it. It was very valuable, being nearly two thousand a year, besides a charming residence and grounds, close to the family seat, and ensuring a full participation in all the pleasures and prestige of such a position.

Mr. Fielding said but little on the subject, though no doubt he thought a great deal; but Mrs. Fielding was less reticent, and often and often was I the recipient of

her confidences on the occasion, with all the fluctuating hopes and fears that alternately agitated her maternal heart. Sometimes she would ask me *when* did I think Mr. Mostyn would actually propose to Edith? Did I think he was waiting till he came into possession of his living, and was leaving Castleford? Had I any idea whether Sir Robert was aware of his son's attachment? No doubt Dr. Temple knew all about it, and had possibly told him.

To none of these questions and surmises could I return any satisfying answer, so I only added my own wonderment to Mrs. Fielding's, and discussed the matter in whatever light she saw it for the time being. There was no doubt Mr. Mostyn *did* care for Edith, but to what extent or to what degree I could not tell. I saw she had perfect trust and confidence in him, and Edith, who had never entertained a shade of preference for any man before,

had, I felt sure, given up her whole heart unreservedly to his keeping.

I had plenty of opportunities of observing them together. We went so often to the Rectory, whilst he came to us constantly from thence, and no one could doubt that a very strong attraction brought Edgar Mostyn into Edith's company so often. After a time I saw he was changed—as every man heartily in love must be for a time to all around him—he was less cold and apathetic, he entered more into the common cares and interests of humanity, and when with Edith I observed his whole countenance softened and altered, whilst he seemed quite absorbed as he looked at or listened to her. His stern look melted away, and then I fully believed he loved the girl as she deserved to be loved. There were other times when he appeared to me to be fighting against himself, endeavouring to guard his words and looks from becoming warmer or softer than those he would have bestowed

on a beloved sister; but still he sought Edith on all occasions, and never, when she was present, for a moment devoted himself to any other woman.

I do not think she perceived the variation in his moods, for whether more or less engrossed, still she always seemed satisfied that he sought no other than herself, and that his looks were constantly turned towards her, even if he talked to her less than usual.

Things remained in much the same state for a year after the first introduction of the pair whom I could not help regarding as lovers, though there was as yet no outward acknowledgment of the fact to others.

What passed between themselves at that time I cannot tell, enough it seemed to content a simple-minded girl like Edith that all was right and fair on the part of the man she so utterly loved and trusted.

Edith had become a changed person. She was absorbed in her love, She cared

little for anything that had formerly pleased and amused her. Edgar never went to balls or places of public amusement; he said he did not consider them wrong, but it was a wearisome employment of time to him, therefore he did not frequent them. After that, Mrs. Fielding had no cause to complain of her duties as a chaperon—they were all over and gone. Edith said she had had enough of gaiety, and cared no more for the things she had so dearly loved but one short year before!

I loved the girl, and yet I was as nothing then to her; but I trembled for her future. What if the love so intensely felt and lavishly bestowed should be thrown back upon herself? What would become of the poor child whose whole heart and soul was now cast upon that one hope in life?

CHAPTER III.

THUS we went on through that year. Easter came round again, with its peculiar duties to be performed, and then the annual ball that marked its close.

Edith had now passed her nineteenth birthday, but what an altered person had she become in the last year. No talk of balls now, no hopes or fears for anything that was not connected with Edgar Mostyn. One day she came to me, as she was in the constant habit of doing, but looking intensely miserable,—it was the morning of the ball,—and she asked me if I was going.

I told her yes, and asked her if she were not going also. A quick and hasty gesture of denial was her only answer. I said, play-

fully,—"Cannot we persuade Dr. Temple and Mr. Mostyn to join our party?"

Edith made no reply, but after a minute's silence, whispered,

"Do you not know he is going away?"

I had heard some talk of the probability of Mr. Mostyn's leaving after Easter, but had never heard it either from himself or his Rector, so I answered,

"I think if he—Mr. Mostyn—is really going he would have told us of it himself."

"He *has* told me. I saw him this morning. He is going the end of the week."

"Well?" said I, expecting some further revelation, but none came, and the poor girl was weeping bitterly.

"Surely he will not leave you so," I exclaimed, with sudden indignation. She only answered,

"He will do nothing but what is right."

"But, my dear child, surely, surely—he must—he will——"

I was very incoherent, for I knew so

little, and yet felt so much, but Edith came to me and whispered,

"Please do not say a word against him —no one knows——"

I do not know what further she might have said, as my husband just then came into the room, and Edith, fearing to face him with her tell-tale face, slipped away and was out of the house before I had missed her. Dr. Grey came to ask me to visit one of his poor patients, and after we had walked there, and stayed some little time, we were on our road home, when, coming in sight of the Rectory, he suddenly observed he wanted to ask the Rector a question, and would I mind coming in with him for a few moments?

Of course I was ready to do so, and we were admitted. My husband proceeded at once to Dr. Temple's study, whilst I was shown into the dining-room on the opposite side of the hall, and found the room already occupied by Mr. Mostyn,

who was busily engaged in writing when I entered. I begged him not to disturb himself, but continue his writing, whilst I said I would be glad to look at the newspaper which I saw lying by him on the table. I advanced to take it, to save him the trouble of getting up, and whilst I held out my hand to take it, my eye involuntarily fell on an envelope already directed, and close to the paper. Mr. Mostyn followed the direction of my look, and then (it was addressed to Edith) raised his eyes quickly to mine, saying, in an eager, impetuous manner,

"Yes, Mrs. Grey, you see I am writing to Edith, to bid her good-bye. You may have heard that I am going away?"

"Yes—she told me so," I answered, half wondering at the change in his manner from his usual guarded self-possession and reserve; he seemed, however, strangely moved as he continued, as if partly to himself and me—"Yes, it is time indeed to

part now; and do you blame me for it, for I know you love her? Forgive my troubling you with this question."

I was so astounded at this sudden and unlooked-for approach to confidence on Mr. Mostyn's part that I could hardly rally my thoughts enough to express, or give utterance to those that crowded into my mind. So I stood facing the young man with my hand on the paper, whilst he looked up, eager and impatient for my answer. At last I said,

"You must be more explicit, Mr. Mostyn, before I can say whether I consider you to blame or not. May I ask you whether you are leaving for good? and what Edith has to do with your intentions?"

"Nothing—nothing, poor darling! It has been long settled, and now the time has come, and I thought to tell her of it—and I did so."

"Well?" said I, breathlessly, for I felt

a strange interest in these two young people, who were really nothing to me.

"Well, then," he returned, speaking with visible effort, "I went to see Edith, but when I told her the bare fact, I saw —and perceived for the first time all that that fact comprised for her—and in becoming aware of her feelings, I ascertained my own also, and the extent of the sacrifice that is demanded of me."

I looked at the agitated young man with intense surprise.

"I cannot understand you in any way, Mr. Mostyn. If, as you say, you and Edith Fielding are attached to each other—is it not what you mean to say?"

He did not speak, only slightly bending his head in affirmation, and then looking at me to proceed, which I did, saying,

"Well, then, if you are fortunate enough to have won her heart, and love her in return, what do you mean by talking of

'*sacrifice*'? Surely no one could object to Edith herself."

Here he interrupted me, saying vehemently,

"Oh, no—oh, no; she is only too good and perfect for me."

"Well, then," I continued, "if she and her family do not think so, or yours object in any way, I cannot see what cause you can have for all this misery, unless, indeed, you have, perhaps—" and then I hesitated, but he made a gesture for me to proceed so I concluded hastily—"entered into some other engagement."

"Ah, there it is!" he exclaimed, with a sigh so deep, I pitied him from the bottom of my heart; and as he remained silent, I continued, now more sure of my ground—

"This is indeed an unfortunate state of things; but oh, Mr. Mostyn, why did not that deter you from endeavouring to win the affections of such a girl as Edith?"

"I never intended to do so, nor dreamt

of loving her in any other way than as a charming sister when we first became acquainted; but the gentle fascination stole upon me unawares. She is so utterly unlike all other girls—so simple, so sweet, so thoughtless of self. Oh, why—oh, why——"

"Surely, Mr. Mostyn, if, as you say, you have already met with another to whom you are engaged, it is unworthy of you to descant on the perfections of the girl you have so unhappily deceived into a belief of your attachment to herself." I hardly knew what to say, and I felt angry at his presuming to extol Edith whilst his troth was plighted to another. Mr. Mostyn looked at me with a somewhat perplexed expression, so I finished my speech by saying plainly—"As you are engaged to another lady, the less you say about Miss Fielding—and to me, her friend—the better. I do not desire to hear more."

I was then turning to leave the table,

when Mr. Mostyn laid his hand on mine, which still held the newspaper, and exclaimed—

"Oh, indeed, Mrs. Grey, but you must hear me. Pray excuse my importunity, but I wish you to know that you utterly and entirely mistake my meaning and my feelings in every way."

I was conscious of a little throb of joy as the young man said this, thinking and hoping that it was not all over yet with my poor little Edith's prospects, so I seated myself on a chair close by, and prepared to hear what more Mr. Mostyn might be pleased to communicate; and seeing by my change of countenance and position that I was ready to hear, he continued—

"The engagement I alluded to is of a very different nature from that you imagine; it is no earthly one, but you know I am in the Church, and (it is needless now to say) I have been compelled to enter for family

reasons, but having given my consent most unwillingly, I am prepared to do my very best in the unfortunate position in which I am placed."

"I have no doubt of it," I murmured; and then added—"and I am sure you cannot do better than take such a wife as I believe you have chosen in Edith to aid and help you in doing that *very best.*"

"That is *your* view of a very important question, but, unhappily, it is not *mine.* No, there can be no wife for me. I advocate the celibacy of the clergy."

"Good heavens, Mr. Mostyn!" I exclaimed, startled out of all self-possession, "surely I have not mistaken that you are a Protestant?"

"No, I am not a Protestant, as you suppose, but a Catholic priest of the English Church."

"Holding," I exclaimed, indignantly, "Roman Catholic views and tenets!"

"I hold such views as my conscience

approves and those I esteem most, consider best and most reasonable, and I maintain that a married clergyman must be absorbed in earthly love for a human creature, besides all engrossed with family cares, and pains, and pleasures, instead of feeling free to dedicate himself body and soul to the profession he has entered."

But I will not pursue the long conversation and argument that this declaration of Mr. Mostyn's views and sentiments led to. At last he brought forward in his support our good friend the Rector, who, he said, entertained similar views to his own, and then he desired me to look at his blameless, happy life, and entire devotion to others, and say if his path must not be the right one.

I only answered—

"For *him*, perhaps, it may, but not for *you*, who have to answer for the destroyed happiness of the girl you love, and whose heart you have won, and perhaps broken."

When I said that, without effort or premeditation, I was pleased to see a relenting expression steal over his countenance, and he looked at me eagerly, saying,

"Ah, if I could but think that in any way wrong could be made right!"

"Well," said I, "suppose you consult Dr. Temple himself, and, perhaps, confide your doubts and scruples to Edith herself, and be guided by what they both say and think."

"Dr. Temple, *yes*," he answered; "I will speak to and consult *him*, but not Edith —she knows nothing of my doubts and fears, and if—if ever I could bring myself to feel I could or dared to ask her to share my fate, I must have no remembrance of such scruples coming between her and me to disturb the sweet serenity of her pure mind. No, she knows nothing as yet, but if I decide on abiding by my first conviction, she shall know all —not unless."

And there our conference ended. I was satisfied that there was a softening influence at work in the young man's heart, and glad that he should volunteer to seek counsel on the momentous subject. I only hoped most fervently that Dr. Temple's advice might be such as could be desired by those most deeply interested.

I hastened home, anxious to hear my husband's opinion, and to relate all that had passed. He heard me attentively, and with a kindly interest, for little Edith Fielding was a special favourite of his, and he had long lived on terms of friendly intimacy with her father and all the family, and he was aware that we all looked forward to Edith's probable engagement to, and marriage with, Mr. Mostyn as a very desirable event, and one in which the girl's own happiness was vitally concerned. At the close of my narrative, I asked if he had ever suspected that Mr. Mostyn entertained peculiar and unsuit-

able views for a clergyman of the Established Church.

Dr. Grey replied he had seldom approached the subject with the young man—he had indeed always found him peculiarly reserved on that topic and on all that concerned himself personally—but he remembered that Dr. Temple, when expecting Edgar Mostyn, had said something about his father's anxiety on the subject of his son's clerical views, and had expressed his hopes that a residence with his old friend would be beneficial in every way to him.

"But," said I, "Mr. Mostyn talks of Dr. Temple's entertaining similar views to himself, adducing, in proof, that he has never married."

"Mostyn states an undeniable fact—but he draws inferences from it which are by no means justified by actual circumstances. Dr. Temple is, we all know, a single man, but I have reason to believe that he would gladly have been happily married long ere

this—but the lady to whom he was attached died soon after their engagement, and I believe he has never since sought or met with anyone to replace her in his affections; but he has told me he finds sufficient interest in his church and work to occupy his time and fill his heart. No doubt, as he seldom talks of himself, or his own affairs, his feelings and motives may have been differently construed."

"I am thankful to hear all this," I said; "but I fear we have a very decided character to deal with in Edgar Mostyn, and if he has imbibed wrong notions, it will be difficult to persuade him of their fallacy."

"I hardly know," returned my husband. "I should scarcely call Mostyn a man of great decision of character; he is rather rigid and unyielding at times, but, as I have said, we have seldom discussed subjects of peculiar interest. I remember, now, Temple spoke of his having spent some time in Spain, and formed a great

friendship with a family there of the very oldest nobility and of the most intolerant Roman Catholic principles, but he said he trusted the impression they had made on his mind was wearing away, and lamented that it had been very unfavourable to the career he was destined to run in his future life as an English country clergyman; in fact, I should say Dr. Temple regarded his new Curate as a young man of an imaginative disposition, and as yet of very unsettled, and, it may be, unsound opinions in many respects. I think he considers that Mostyn requires a good deal of sound treatment—much as I should recommend to my fanciful patients a course of air, exercise, and wholesome diversion. You need have no fear that his Rector will encourage any morbid fancies, or unhealthy ascetic mortifications."

And with this opinion I was fain to rest content, till I should hear more of the subject from the parties most deeply concerned.

CHAPTER IV.

I HAD not long to wait; towards the afternoon of the next day a note was brought to me, which on opening, I found to my surprise was from Edgar Mostyn. I had in the meantime seen nothing of Edith Fielding or any of her family. I hastily opened the letter, rather surprised that, whether for weal or woe, the young man should have sent me the communication. The contents were as follows:

"Dear Mrs. Grey,

"You will forgive my troubling you with this note, but the kind interest you took in my affairs yesterday makes me desirous that you should become acquaint-

ed with their present position from myself.

"In a few words I must tell you that Edith Fielding and I are engaged. It seems strange to me to write the words, after having for so long intended to lead a single life. Had I never met with her, no doubt I should have carried out my resolution, and even now I adhere to the belief that my former determination was founded in reason and religion. Still I break no covenant in entering into the engagement I have formed, and which I am aware the 'Protestant' Church sanctions and approves —so I will say no more about my doubts and difficulties. Had my own happiness *alone* been at stake, I would cheerfully have sacrificed it to follow what I believe to be the higher road to all that is right; but as I have heedlessly and selfishly imperilled that of another—of one who is, and ever will be, under all circumstances, inexpressibly dear to me, and who deserves every consideration at my hands—I yield

myself to the occasion. She loves me, and it shall be the study of my future life to make her happy, and I only pray it may not be at the *price of my soul!*

"Forgive my having thus far trespassed on your indulgence, in confiding to you the reasons which have prompted me to enter on this momentous step. The conflicting sentiments which have accompanied the resolve are known to few—least of all to my future wife. May I ask you kindly to respect my secret, and believe me always,

"Yours gratefully,

"EDGAR MOSTYN."

It was a strange letter, and not altogether satisfactory. However, I quite agreed with the writer that, now he was engaged to be married, it was wise to let all his former scruples be buried in oblivion, and, most of all, never to let Edith suspect that Edgar Mostyn's proposals

were made more in consideration for *her* feelings than his own, or how great a sacrifice of principle the concession involved on the part of her future husband.

I was naturally very anxious to see Edith, now that the fact of her engagement was a settled thing. I almost wondered that she had not come to announce the event to me, who had partaken so largely of her confidences and anxiety during the past year. However, whilst I was musing, and meditating a walk to the Fieldings' house, Edith's mother came to see me, and to tell the happy news. I never saw satisfaction more plainly depicted than on that motherly, beaming countenance, as she entered the room, and taking both my hands in hers, exclaimed,

"Congratulate me, dear Mrs. Grey! I am the happiest woman in the world! Dear little Edie is actually engaged to be married to Edgar Mostyn! He proposed to her yesterday afternoon, and she seems

quite overwhelmed with happiness—that is, she looks almost stunned—as if she had never expected it. Foolish child!—as if we had not all seen long ago what his admiration of her must come to! I am sure you saw it, as plainly as any of us."

"Yes, indeed. No one could doubt that Mr. Mostyn liked and admired your dear child. But I must go and congratulate Edith myself. I will go back with you."

So I went back with the mother, and saw the daughter. Edith said very little. She was, as her mother said, hardly herself yet; she could not realize the fact that she was Edgar's promised bride. She whispered to me,

"It seems so strange that we should really belong to each other for all our lives!—that *he*, who is so superior, should care to have me for his constant companion. Oh! dear Mrs. Grey, what can I do to make myself in any way worthy of such a lot?"

I tried to combat this extreme humility

by laughing at her, and observing that that was not the right way to accept her present position. She might very reasonably consider that in promising to become Mr. Mostyn's wife, she gave quite as much as she received, and she must not make him conceited by letting him see she looked upon him as so very superior. But Edith was neither to be persuaded of that, nor to be induced to see her betrothed in any other light but that in which her exalted imagination chose to place him. Soon after the lover himself made his appearance, and I was satisfied to see them together, and observe the brightness he brought with him.

There was a slightly conscious look on his face as he greeted me on entering the room, but I left him in no doubt as to the sincerity of my congratulations, and my real pleasure in seeing him there as the future husband of my favourite, Edith Fielding.

There was no doubt that Mr. Mostyn was very fond of Edith—deeply attached to her

—and yet, after a time, as her accepted lover, he seemed almost (if that could be possible) to feel himself in an awkward position, as if he was playing a part quite uncongenial to his nature, and even at variance with his feelings; in fact, he was far more natural as a lover, when he was all unconscious of being so, than now it was his duty and privilege to enact the part. At least, this was the impression his attentions to Edith in public gave me. No doubt, when he and Edith were by themselves, they would both fall into a more natural and happy understanding.

Mr. Fielding expressed himself perfectly satisfied with his little daughter's choice, and received Mr. Mostyn's proposals with honest and hearty approbation. So far all went well, but Mr. Fielding made one proviso, that nothing should be considered settled until Sir Robert Mostyn had been written to, and his full consent obtained. The desired letter was written, and an-

swered without loss of time, conveying Sir Robert's full consent, and showing an earnest desire to become acquainted with his future daughter-in-law and her family.

I suspect that Sir Robert had already received a hint or two from his friend, Dr. Temple, with sundry annotations and reflections, which might cause the father's consent to be the more readily bestowed. No doubt the accounts, too, of Edith and her family were also such as to make the father rejoice that his wayward son had chosen so wisely and so well, and to stimulate his desire to become acquainted with the girl of whom his friend spoke so highly.

Sir Robert proposed coming to Dr. Temple's for an introduction, and Lady Mostyn would have gladly accompanied him, but she was an invalid, and then on the point of leaving home for the benefit of her health. Edgar was almost agitated when he announced this intention on his father's part; he came occasionally in those

days to see and talk to me, sometimes of Edith, and often of other matters; but the old subject that had brought us so intimately acquainted was entirely dropped as far as discussion went, though I could perceive it was rarely absent from the young clergyman's thoughts, and could trace a constant struggle in his mind, as if he sought to justify himself to himself.

When he and Edith came, as they often did, together, he would, as it were, retrace his steps to the old days, when they were all-unconscious lovers; he would make her sing the same songs, and talk of all things that interested them both in those happy days; but, strange to say, I never heard him dwelling on the future, or descanting on the home and the happiness that awaited them together in their future life. I fancy Edith felt and observed this, though she would not for the world have given her thoughts a tangible form by clothing them in speech. No word ever passed her lips

that did not denote perfect confidence in, as well as devoted love for, the man she had chosen. I dared not even ask her if he had described her future home to her, and whether she did not long to see it. She had grown very grave—quite unlike the Edith of seventeen Summers, who was as bright then as a sunbeam.

I could hardly tell what it was that made her so serious, for the course of her love ran, to all appearance, as smoothly as possible. Everyone smiled upon her and her lover, and said how well she had chosen, how happy her future lot would be with him; and, more than all, she loved the man she had chosen with an intensity of affection that made her almost indifferent to every other person and thing that crossed her daily path. Love with Edith was a very serious thing, and her intended husband took all very seriously; he evidently looked upon life and its deepest interests with more fear than pleasure, his great

dread apparently being that he should become wholly engrossed in them, and in his affection for one fair loving creature.

There was no spirit of cheerfulness in their wooing, and though Edgar was always ready to take part, and even affect an interest in the Fielding family concerns, it was evident he did not amalgamate with them, or throw himself heartily into the pursuits and interests that occupied his future wife's family.

Poor Mrs. Fielding, in spite of her intense admiration—mixed with a little awe—for her son-in-law elect, did now and then express to me a wish that he were a trifle more "merry," and would laugh at the things that amused them all.

One of the married daughters, the youngest, Emily, with her husband, who was a clergyman, with a small living in the north, was asked to come and stay with them, as it was thought they would be particularly acceptable acquaintances to their future

brother-in-law. Mr. Mostyn received their kindly advances with perfect friendliness, but Mr. Hayward declared he never advanced one step further on the road to intimacy; he was himself a remarkably cheerful man, excellent in his profession, and devoted to his family, but entirely wanting in the extreme and delicate refinement that was so particularly characteristic of Edgar Mostyn.

The elder clergyman often tried to draw out the younger one, in his open-hearted, genial way, but though his advances were met with apparent cordiality, no progress was made towards real acquaintance. His pretty but plain-spoken wife chafed under this aspect of affairs, and occasionally made me the confidant of her discontent; one day she said to me,

"How things change, Mrs. Grey, even in the very common affair of making love. I do think that Mr. Mostyn and little Edie are the very coolest couple of young

people I ever had the good luck to meet."

"You must not infer from that," said I, "my dear Mrs. Hayward, that they are not as warmly attached (and I am sure I I believe them to be so) as the most demonstrative couple of your acquaintance. Please remember that 'still waters run the deepest.'"

"Oh! yes, I have heard all that; but it is hardly natural the way they go on. Mr. Mostyn never seems to wish to be alone with Edith, and he talks just the same to her as he does to me or mamma, and what do you think I found out is their amusement when we considerately consign them to their own society for a few hours in the day? You will never guess; he is teaching her Spanish! They study it together, he told me, and seemed to think it was a most pleasant and profitable way of employing their time; and then there is Edie, who used to be so merry, carrying about a great Spanish dictionary, and when she is

not gazing at Edgar, staring into it! It is too absurd. I should like to shake them both, and make them less *rational*, as they no doubt call themselves."

I laughed at her indignation, though at the same time I had been conscious of something of the same kind of feeling in regard to the lovers, but I had no doubt, from my knowledge of both, that they were really as deeply attached to each other as their best friends could desire, and this conviction I tried to impart to the impetuous sister. She heard me rather impatiently, and then observed—

"What you say may be very true, and I am quite aware that Edie is about to make what is called 'an excellent match.' No one can doubt that Mr. Mostyn is a man of excellent family, and wonderfully good-looking—too much so, I think, for a man; those fine classical features and general *tournure* are too perfect for my taste; he looks more like a mediæval saint

than an every-day common-place clergyman; he seems too fine for his earthly office, and he never condescends to look at the children" (Mrs. Hayward had two "darlings" with her); "he will hardly let Edith even pay them the least attention, and she used to be so fond of Cissy and Willie. Oh! Mrs. Grey, I can never fancy Edgar Mostyn a '*family man!*'"

No more could I, but possibly he would alter after marriage, and condescend to things of "low estate;" but at present he certainly ignored the little beings, and thereby incurred their mamma's special displeasure.

About this time Sir Robert Mostyn came on his promised visit to Dr. Temple. His son had been engaged to Edith Fielding nearly two months when he came amongst us, and Edgar's departure had been delayed in consequence. Dr. Temple urged his remaining with him until his

father's visit, and under the circumstances he could hardly refuse to do so.

Sir Robert's coming had been delayed from week to week, from some unavoidable cause or other, and Lady Mostyn was already at a friend's house in Kent, *en route* for Folkestone, from which place they were to embark for Ostend, so she and her two unmarried daughters contented themselves with writing to their future daughter and sister-in-law, sending all kind and pretty messages about their hopes of meeting immediately on their return to England.

Sir Robert Mostyn, when he came, seemed charmed with his son Edgar's future wife. He spoke of her with the highest admiration and approval, and said she was everything he could desire. We all liked Sir Robert extremely, and he and Mr. Fielding got on extremely well together. He was a fine-looking, gentle-

manly man, with a very penetrating expression of countenance, and decided look and manner. I could quite imagine how naturally he would have his way in his own family, and how easily he could carry all before him. He seemed on excellent terms with his son, but I could detect something of an anxious and inquiring look as he bent those penetrating eyes upon him and his future bride.

Edgar was very charming and deferential in his manner to his father, and seemed pleased and satisfied at his unqualified approval of Edith and her family. His elder brother was about to make a great marriage, but Sir Robert seemed equally pleased that his younger son should have chosen *his* wife from a less lofty position, whilst he was quite satisfied that in beauty and refinement little Edie was in no respects inferior to his other future daughter-in-law. He seemed to think that, as a clergyman's wife and their own nearest

neighbour and relative, they could desire no one more suitable and charming than Edgar's chosen bride.

CHAPTER V.

AND so the time passed away quickly enough after Sir Robert Mostyn's arrival, and soon the day of his departure drew near, and with it that of his son Edgar's also. When once the day was named, I could see that Edith gradually became even graver and more absorbed than ever, whilst I could trace something like an appearance of relief on the countenance of her betrothed. I fancied he longed to be free from all the surrounding circumstances of his engagement. The constant and familiar intercourse of a family, even as unobjectionable as that of the Fieldings, at times appeared to oppress and bewilder him.

Happily Edith's quiet and subdued ways and manner could never have that effect upon him, and he often seemed to find relief in her sole companionship, though even then he placed the barrier of the Spanish dictionary between her and more familiar approach on his own part. But with all that, I saw he loved her devotedly still; his human heart had found a resting-place from which no effort of his own could dislodge it. I thought to myself, "When once they are safely married, and it will be his duty to love his wife, no doubt all will come right," and I only wished the time were closer at hand. Just then it seemed very far off. We were then in the middle of the sweet Summer months, and it was settled that the marriage should not take place till the following Spring. There were various reasons assigned for this delay, and all were of due weight and importance. The first arose from the intended absence of the Mostyn family during

the Winter, and Lady Mostyn's natural desire to be present at the ceremony.

They were then on their way to Paris, where the elder brother's marriage was to take place, and he would not be satisfied unless his brother Edgar took part in the solemnization. After that affair was concluded, Edgar Mostyn was to return and take possession of his own living, and acquaint himself with the people and duties connected with it, before he could bring his bride to share his new home; and there were, besides, various necessary alterations and improvements to be made in the old house before, in Sir Robert's opinion, it would be a desirable habitation. All these things he considered could not be accomplished before or a little after Christmas, but after that time the young people might name their day for the wedding.

This was the Mostyn state of the affair, but the Fieldings had also their reasons to bring forward for a short delay, and the

engaged pair being so young and inexperienced, it would be all in their favour. The fact was Mrs. Fielding had a fixed prejudice against allowing the marriage of any of her daughters to take place before they had attained the age of twenty.

"*One* and twenty would be better," said the anxious mother, "but I cannot, with my free will and consent, allow any daughter of mine to enter upon the cares and anxieties of married life whilst still in her teens; let the poor girls have their brief period of gaiety and enjoyment. Life is often hard enough (though, thank God, none of my girls have ever found it so); but do let them bring a little experience for the benefit of their husbands as well as themselves."

It had therefore been the custom of Mrs. Fielding, as soon as any of her daughters were engaged to be married, to put them into a regular course of training for the better management of their household

and domestic affairs, whilst she strenuously opposed all thoughts of the marriage taking place before their twentieth birthday. I believe she had been pretty successful as regarded two of her three married daughters, but there was one, Cecilia, the second, whose husband being on the point of sailing for a civil appointment in India, craved and obtained a dispensation, and carried his bride off with him at the age of nineteen.

"But then," said the careful mother, "it is not the same out there, and I could not help Cissy much in the housekeeping way in India, so Mr. Sidney, I said, must take her in all her ignorance and inexperience with him, if he was so determined." And Mr. Sidney, declaring it would be the "bliss of ignorance," was content to take Cissy Fielding in her normal condition.

But with Edith it was another thing, as it had been with her sister Emily before her. Their intended husbands were clergy-

men, and their wives must enter upon their new estate competent and equal to the many duties that would be required of them. Edith especially, as the wife of a clergyman of extensive means and influence, must be able to assist him in every way, and although their income would be ample, she ought to be taught how to manage a larger household, and keep all expenses within proper limits; therefore, as Edith would complete her twentieth year just before Easter, her mother begged that the wedding might not take place till the week after. Mr. Fielding also favoured the proposition, as the short delay would enable him with more convenience to call in and make over the money he had promised to settle on his daughter at her marriage.

Neither Edgar nor Edith said a word to all these propositions; they seemed content to let their elders settle everything for them, and when all was thus arranged,

they readily signified their consent to every proposal thus made.

Edgar Mostyn came, the evening before his departure, to wish my husband and myself good-bye.

"We shall all seem very much at a loss without you," I said, as a farewell observation, and then added—"But no doubt you will run down often, and give us a look before the final parting time arrives?"

Edgar Mostyn was sitting with folded arms looking into our sunny little garden behind the house, and he started as I said these few common-place words, and he repeated some of them.

"Come often!—well, no, I do not think that will be necessary, but I shall always, at all times and seasons, be glad to see you, dear Mrs. Grey, and the doctor again."

"That is right; then we shall hope to see you here before long once more, and I have no doubt you and Edith will give us

a welcome, if ever we should chance to find ourselves in your neighbourhood."

"Ah, that is a long way off at present."

"I daresay it seems so to you, but you will find the few months will slip away quickly enough when you set to work in your new parish."

"Perhaps so, but I fear it will be up-hill work at first; however, it has to be done," he concluded, with a sigh of resignation; and then, after he had risen to say good-bye, he lingered for a moment, looking rather wistfully in my face, but at length said, in a hesitating manner,

"Perhaps you will let me hear from you now and then? When you have nothing better to do, it would be a charity to bestow a few lines on me. All my own people will be away, and I expect to find it rather dreary in my new home, with only the former incumbent, but I daresay I shall soon get used to it."

"I shall be delighted to write and send

you all the Castleford news—only I daresay I shall be forestalled by Edith."

"I shall no doubt hear *from* her, but I should be glad to hear *of* her from you."

"Well, you may depend on my obliging you in that way; but I hope you will soon come back. It will shorten the time so much, both to yourself and Edith."

"Oh! Mrs. Grey, I could wish—if it were not such a vain wish——" And then he paused with a flitting smile, but said no more, so of course I could only ask,

"Well, may I hear what your wish is?"

"Only that Edith and I were already together in Paradise, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage!"

"And no separation," I added. "But I hope you and Edith will enjoy a very happy earthly time before that consummation takes place!"

"Oh! yes, no doubt we shall; but it is difficult to realise it at present." And then

he shook hands rather abruptly and went his way.

I repeated our little conversation to my husband, observing that I feared Edgar Mostyn was not as settled in his mind, and happy in his prospects, as he ought to be. Dr. Grey agreed with me, but said he had no doubt all would come right in time, that he thought it was a good thing he was going to make a little absence before the marriage took place, as he would feel the want of Edith's society, and no doubt be better able to appreciate the pleasure when deprived of its enjoyment.

In answer to this, I could not help expressing my own fears that in solitude he might brood over his unfortunate doubts and scruples until they became painfully dominant in his mind, and that I could not help suspecting he half regretted the step he was about to take. Dr. Grey replied,

"It is a morbid fancy, and I trust to his being convinced that it is so before long.

Mostyn will have an excellent companion, I am told, in his new duties, for a short time, in a clever, sensible, and enlightened man of cheerful mind, but strict principles. He has held the living hitherto, and has lately accepted an important piece of ecclesiastical preferment in a Colonial Bishopric which has been offered him since his resignation. Sir Robert told me he had bespoken his aid and indulgent assistance in his son's peculiar case, and had no doubt Edgar would benefit immensely from the companionship."

"Then I almost wonder he sent Edgar here to be with Dr. Temple, especially as he had an idea that on some points they thought alike."

"So I hope they do on a great many—for Dr. Temple is an excellent and worthy divine, but in this particular and unhappy notion to which I suppose you refer, advocating the celibacy of the clergy in conformance with the Church of Rome—you

have had, I hope, convincing proof how our young friend was restored from his delusion, for I am pretty sure that, in spite of his attachment to Edith, and belief in her love for himself, he would never have proposed to her, had it not been for the convincing arguments of his Rector."

I shook my head, as I replied, in the words of the old saying—

> "'He who is convinced against his will,
> Is of the same opinion still.'"

"Not against his *will* in this case, I hope," said my husband, smiling. "I am sure his *will*—that is his *heart*—went with his conviction, and we shall see the result ere long; but in respect to Mostyn's originally coming here, Sir Robert thought an entire change of scene and persons desirable for his son—for he told me he was very uneasy about him when he first came from abroad, and that nothing ever gave him sincerer satisfaction than the announcement of his happy matrimonial prospects."

"I wish we could see more appearance of happiness in the two persons so vitally concerned in these prospects. I fear that in Mr. Mostyn's case, having once formed an opinion—erroneous as it may be, and although he has been induced to yield to the dictates of his heart, and love for Edith—he finds it difficult, if not impossible, to cast aside his former views. I told you I considered him a man of very decided character."

"And so do *not* I—or his father either."

"Ah! because his father exacts an obedience from him that he yields in dutiful affection against his own wishes. I can quite fancy Sir Robert Mostyn ruling his own household, and compelling even the strong wills to bend to his own."

"Rather, I imagine, it is the father's strong will coercing the weak one of his son, and endeavouring to guide and guard against the false impressions produced by

a too vivid and somewhat morbid imagination. Sir Robert tells me that Edgar, with a very amiable disposition and good heart, has been the subject of these (I may call them) hallucinations, in various ways, all his life, and has caused him much anxiety in consequence; but he does not doubt that a quiet life of steady work in his own parish, aided by a charming wife, and in the midst of his own friends and relations, will bring about an entire cure, and he confided thus much to me that, if needful, our influence might aid the good work, if occasion offered."

I pondered for awhile, but at last ventured to express my apprehension that Edgar Mostyn's state of mind in regard to the celibacy of the clergy of his own Church was more of a *conviction* (dangerous as was the error), and could hardly be called an hallucination. And then I brought forward what I had already observed when

we first knew Edgar Mostyn, how unyielding he was when, having once expressed an opinion, it might be on indifferent matters, he found it questioned.

"Ah! *that*, and his extreme reserve, is his armour; he entrenches himself behind it—he may be *pertinacious* (not strong) in argument, when he ventures upon it, but I consider he would be weak in practice, if his sentiments were subjected to the trial of time, or the counter working of any strong and overwhelming influence. In the present instance his love for Edith, aided by his Rector's remonstrances, has apparently swept away all his strongholds of prejudice, but as his character has a great element of weakness in it, he cannot all at once reconcile himself to his novel position (as would a stronger-minded man), but he hovers, as it were, between the two opinions; but you may safely depend upon time and friendly ministrations to complete the cure. You will see Edgar Mostyn and

his wife as happy as you can desire, and as she deserves to be."

That was too pleasant a termination to our little argument to be farther pursued by me—in fact, Dr. Grey considered it entirely and conclusively ended, and as I had the fullest faith in his powers of perception, both as regarded mind and body, I felt more satisfied with poor little Edith's matrimonial prospects than I had done from the time, or soon after that, of the announcement of her engagement to Edgar Mostyn.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER Mr. Mostyn's departure, which took place the next day, we all felt rather lost and strange without him. For more than a year he had been amongst us, an object of peculiar interest and speculation, before all hopes and fears were satisfactorily merged in his engagement to Edith Fielding. We had indeed enjoyed a time of mild excitement whilst that important event was pending, nor had it by any means subsided since that period.

The few weeks which had elapsed after that time were not altogether as satisfac-factory to look back upon as could be desired either for the girl herself or for those most deeply interested in her welfare. But

Edith's father perhaps saw less of any inconsistencies in his future son-in-law's conduct to his promised wife than did some other members of the family party, including myself, who lived on terms of peculiar intimacy with them. Mr. Fielding was so much occupied and engrossed with the cares and duties of his profession that he saw but little of his family till they assembled at the seven o'clock dinner, and then was so perfectly satisfied that all was going on happily and well between Edith and her lover that a shade of suspicion had never crossed his mind that it could be otherwise. He was extremely partial to Edgar Mostyn, and, in fact, rather proud of him and the connection altogether; and whatever passing doubts and fears might occasionally assail Mrs. Fielding's mind were, I know, dismissed as vain chimeras of her own imagination, and never imparted to her husband.

As far as the poor child herself was

concerned, not the faintest idea of the scruples which agitated her lover's heart had ever entered her thoughts; she therefore attributed all his changeable moods and fits of coolness to her own deficiencies, and accused herself that she might excuse him.

My husband, like Mr. Fielding, was too deeply engrossed with professional interests to have any time to bestow upon the engaged couple, and except in those instances in which I had bespoken his attention, or Sir Robert Mostyn had volunteered to speak on the subject to Dr. Grey, he was contented to ignore the matter as not coming under the scope of his observation. I have already recorded the opinion expressed by Edith's sister, Emily Hayward, and I believe it was in great measure shared by her worthy husband.

After Edgar was gone, Mrs. Hayward still remained at her father's house; her mother had begged her to do so for a

short time, "to help cheer poor Edie during Edgar's absence," and the good little woman consented to stay on, her husband unselfishly sparing her (to his own great discomfort and inconvenience), but leaving the two "darlings" with their mother, and promising to come and fetch them home himself as soon as they would send for him.

Mrs. Hayward was as much in the dark as her sister as to the cause from whence all Edgar Mostyn's "strangeness," as she called it, proceeded, and so she only accredited him with a certain amount of pride, mixed with shyness, which made him unwilling to betray any of those lively emotions which she considered natural to the situation. I believe that Dr. Temple was the only person besides myself who, being acquainted with facts beneath the surface, watched the progress of the wooing with more than ordinary interest.

I could not help, though as a rule I

avoided all discussion of Mr. Mostyn's affairs even with those best acquainted with them, but I could not help observing, when I first met Dr. Temple after his Curate's departure, that I wished an earlier time had been fixed for the marriage, saying I did not fancy "long engagements."

"We can hardly call this a long engagement," replied the Rector, with a smile, "especially as it is not an indefinite one, but all things being fixed and settled—as far as all human things can be—I am inclined to think that the elder powers, who have so arranged matters, have done wisely and well by the young people."

I could not give in so easily, and murmured something about Mr. Mostyn's peculiar opinions, and the advantage of his settling them and himself as speedily as possible.

"Pardon me," said the Rector, courteously, "but I see things in a different aspect from yourself. I speak to a friend

well acquainted with Mr. Mostyn's unsettled state of mind. Now he has, I hope and trust, got a decided turn in the right direction. No one can doubt it, considering the fact of his engagement to so charming a girl as Miss Fielding. Still it has been a wrench from his former ideas, and it will take time to confirm the good impression, and to uproot the erroneous ones. Nothing that is done in a hurry can be *well* done, least of all taking so important a step as he is contemplating. His mind and opinions are, as it were, in a state of fermentation, and it must take time for them to settle; but when the process has been fully and deliberately gone through, I think you may depend upon the result being a clearer and more settled as well as happier view of life, and its duties and obligations, than he has hitherto held."

I could not but subscribe to these sentiments of the good Doctor, and expressed

my hope that things might turn out just as he predicted.

"Yes," said he, in conclusion, "I do not doubt it. Neither does his father, who looks upon his intended marriage with Miss Fielding as a turning-point in Edgar's life, and one that will lead to as much human happiness as any one man has a right to expect, besides all higher and more important considerations."

These being Dr. Temple's honest convictions, I was glad to adopt them as the fruits of an understanding more experienced and capable than my own, and was in consequence disposed to look upon the present leisure time of Edith's new life and interests as a resting-place from her late anxieties and over-excitement. I was glad to observe that Edith, now released from the constant (and somewhat unsatisfactory) study of her lover's countenance and varying moods, began to recover a little of her former cheerfulness.

She was a person on whom the moods of those she loved acted with almost mesmeric effect, and Edgar's gravity and preoccupation at times had rendered her as taciturn and silent as himself. Now he was absent, she thought only of his rare fits of tenderness, and evident love and admiration for herself, and, as I have said, only attributed to her own want of power of pleasing the coldness and indifference of other times. He had expressed a wish that she should continue her study of Spanish, and wished her to write to him now and then in that language, that he might continue to instruct and improve her. So her thoughts were much turned in that direction, and she rejoiced that she could occupy herself every day *for* him, and in doing that which he desired.

Poor Edith had an idea that Mr. Mostyn considered her education imperfect, and was therefore in a fever to improve herself in every way, and to make herself more

fit, as she said, to become his future companion. Her love was an all-absorbing idolatry; it gave the tone and colour to her whole life, and usurped the place in her heart and soul that no mortal creature was fitted to occupy.

Mrs. Hayward would sometimes laugh as she described Edith's serious occupations and amusements, but she was more indulgent now the lover was absent. "And besides," she would add, "Edie is more like her dear old self now, and can notice my poor pets a little, as she used to do. She is not always on the *qui vive*, as she was when Mr. Mostyn was present, to see whether he was annoyed with the poor children's little prattle, and all their pretty ways; they were quite lost upon his very superior mind—at least, Edie attributed all his strangeness to his superiority. I considered it downright stupidity."

"But some men do not care for children."

"Then they ought to care, especially clergymen; and how Edgar will ever condescend to notice the school-children, and all that he ought to do with and for them, I can never imagine."

"Perhaps, when he has children of his own, he will be more tolerant of the small creatures."

Mrs. Hayward shook her head.

"Maybe—I *hope* he may, but I can never fancy him with a child on his knee, much less carrying one or two about, like my dear husband."

I could see that Mrs. Hayward could never cordially approve of Mr. Mostyn, though she declared she had no particular fault to find with him, and said he was perfect in manner, and almost too handsome, and as Edith was so wrapt up in him, she hoped she should like him better on further acquaintance; but he was not her ideal of what a country clergyman should be, and as her husband was her model, it

must be confessed that all things or persons must alter very much before she was likely to change her opinion.

Emily Hayward was perhaps a little narrow-minded, and if people were not cut out to the exact pattern she thought right, and was accustomed to see and admire, she could not believe it possible that they might have some, though different claims to approbation. No two men could be more dissimilar than Edgar Mostyn, the refined, over-sensitive, and reserved man, and Arthur Hayward, the hearty, robust, practical parish priest; but the two sisters were also so different in every way that it was evident what suited one would not in any way be adapted to the other's taste. However, time went on, unheeding of any of these differences, and Autumn came and went before Edgar Mostyn found time, or, maybe, inclination, to return to Castleford. At last, when he did appear, it was without a word of warning. That

he had been pressed and invited to do so long before may be imagined.

To Edith he accounted for his tardiness by saying that he did not wish to disturb his mind, after he had begun work in earnest. He had been present at his brother's marriage, and stayed rather longer by his mother's persuasion in Paris than he had intended, and after he went home he found much to occupy his time and thoughts. His friend who had filled his place was anxious to make the most of his time before he went out to the Colonial Bishopric which was waiting for him, and Mr. Mostyn, in common courtesy, could hardly leave him again to the superintendence of his large parish, whilst he absented himself in quest of pleasure. Edith readily entered into his feelings, putting her own entirely aside, and patiently waiting till such time as Edgar might find it convenient to come and see her.

That time came quite unexpectedly; he

ran over, he said (some hundred or so miles), for a couple of days, as his friend begged he would do, feeling and expressing the utmost interest in his matrimonial prospects, and being anxious that the girl, of whom he had heard such charming reports from Sir Robert, should not have cause to feel herself neglected on his account.

So Edgar Mostyn came, looking in better health, less worried and anxious, and altogether improved, apparently, in body and mind. His father's hopes were already beginning to be realized, the healthful occupation and genial companionship were bearing such wholesome fruit as had been so sanguinely anticipated, and poor little Edith's heart and eyes overflowed with joy and bright anticipations for the future.

Mrs. Hayward had already departed for her own home, and the happy lovers were left free to discuss all things most interesting to themselves. They came to dine with

us the second day of Edgar's visit, and never had I experienced so much pleasure and satisfaction in seeing my young friends together, whilst Mrs. Fielding told me that now, for the first time, she felt perfectly happy in Edith's engagement, and we both observed that she looked more than beautiful in her heart's contentment.

I made some such remark to Mr. Mostyn as we stood listening to a farewell little Spanish song that Edith was singing at her lover's desire. His eyes were intently fixed on her fair, innocent face, and his whole soul was apparently rapt in the sweet melody. He started when I spoke; then, as she concluded, he answered,

"Yes, it is the face and the voice of an angel, with the heart and disposition also of one! To love such must be good and right! Yes,"—in a lower tone—"and surely to be united to such a being for life must exalt and purify any man's life!"

"To be sure it must," I answered, hastily,

and then added, "But who could for one moment doubt it?"

"Not I," he answered, saying, a moment afterwards, with a grave smile, "I believe I was thinking aloud. It is a bad habit. You must excuse me."

Just then, Edith's song being ended, she rose from the piano and joined us, observing she hoped she did not disturb us, as we seemed to be talking so earnestly, but she came to make a request, which was that Edgar would give them one song before they went away; adding, with a look of pretty entreaty,

"Please, Edgar, sing my old favourite, that Spanish song with English words—'Isabel.'"

"Very well," he answered. "You wish to anticipate my farewell for to-morrow." And then he hummed the refrain of the song:

> "Fare thee well—fare thee well,
> Far hence I must wander to-morrow."

"Yes," said Edith, under her breath, "that is it. It is so lovely and yet so sad. Please sing it, dear."

I looked at the sweet face as she said this, and as she raised her earnest eyes to her lover's face, read in them a depth of affection that was fated to be the weal or woe of the heart that cherished it.

Mr. Mostyn sat down at the piano, accompanying himself with a few sustaining chords, but giving us all the harmony and pathos of the melody in his deep, richly-toned voice. When his last "Fare thee well" sounded in our ears, and he rose and came back to us, no word was spoken till Edith, with a half sob, sighed,

"How beautiful!"

"Yes, the song is pretty enough, and the words rather sad, but I shall not sing it to you, Edith, if you mean always to cry over it."

Edith dried her tears quickly, saying,

"I cannot help it; there is something so

wonderfully mournful in the air and the words. Yet for all that," she added, in a lighter tone, "there is a lovely waltz adapted from the same air, but I suppose it is rather out of fashion now."

"The waltz or the words?" asked Edgar, rather absently.

Edith smiled.

"I meant the music, but the dance is also a thing of the past to me, for I am quite sure that I shall never wish to join in it again."

The young Rector only observed that Mr. and Mrs. Fielding were going, then wished me good night, and the whole party soon after dispersed.

When I went to call on the Fieldings the next morning, I found that Mr. Mostyn had left by an early train.

CHAPTER VII.

EDGAR MOSTYN'S visit had been short, but it was altogether a very satisfactory one to all who were interested in the young couple. Edith evidently revived under its pleasant influences, and seemed to have gained strength of mind and body to bear the remaining intervening period of her engagement with calm philosophy, looking forward to the happy future she believed herself destined to spend with the man to whom she was so utterly devoted.

Christmas approached, and the Fieldings were naturally desirous that their future son-in-law should spend it with them at Castleford, Mrs. Fielding observing to me,

"I hope Mr. Mostyn will be able to come to us—Edith is so anxious that he should. We have written to urge his coming, promising, if all's well, that Mr. Fielding and I will pay him and Edith a visit next Christmas at their home."

I was sorry to find the good people were to be disappointed. Mr. Mostyn wrote to say it was quite impossible for him to leave his parish just then. His friend, Mr. Cameron, had left for his distant Bishopric, and the new Curate whom he expected could not come till after Christmas; but after he had established that gentleman in his new office, he hoped to be perfectly at liberty to follow his own inclinations, and Edith could not doubt where those would lead him. It was a pleasant, cheery letter, and Mrs. Fielding was almost as pleased as if the young Rector had been able to come himself. So Christmas came and went.

Easter was to fall early that year, and

Edith's sweet countenance brightened as she noted that fortunate and obliging circumstance, and told me in how many weeks she could look forward to the happy day that would unite her and her dearly-loved one, and said she had begged that the wedding might take place on her twentieth birthday, as it happened that year, by Easter falling so early, that her birthday would come the week after. We all agreed in thinking that it was a very opportune circumstance, and would fit in nicely with all other arrangements.

It was a very busy time with Mrs. Fielding after Christmas, for then she began in earnest her preparations for Edith's marriage. She was to have the most charming *trousseau* that the Castleford milliner could furnish, and patterns of dresses were to be sent from London; but everything was to be made in the bride's native town, for Mr. and Mrs. Fielding always patronised the inhabitants

of Castleford, as they considered it their bounden duty to do, and, I may add, no family was more highly respected and considered in it than the Fieldings.

Edith's engagement and approaching marriage had excited a great deal of interest and sympathy in the town amongst high and low, and now that the time drew near, all in their several stations brought some little or large token of good-will as an offering to the fair bride. Presents, indeed, began to come in with overwhelming rapidity from far and near. Mr. Fielding was so well-known and highly esteemed that many of his clients sent gifts to his daughter, although personally unknown to her. Letters came from the Mostyn family in different places; the married daughters sent their offerings also, and the newly-married pair, Mr. and Lady Constance Mostyn, who were still abroad, wrote to Edith to say she must come with her husband and pay them a

visit directly after their marriage at their pretty château on Lake Lausanne.

Poor little Edith ! her cup of happiness seemed filled to overflowing; but in the midst of all this, I think she had but one feeling, and that was how Edgar would like it all. She had no thought of herself, or what she would like to do. To be with him, to go anywhere he liked, or stay for ever quietly at home, if he preferred it— to work with him or for him, to rest in his loved presence, and be all-in-all to him, was all her heart craved. She was pleased with all her pretty and valuable presents, because they were given to her on the occasion of her becoming his wife.

Mr. Mostyn wrote to Edith about that time to say the new Curate had appeared, and that they were, he believed, mutually pleased and satisfied with each other; and now he had established Mr. Hervey in his own house, he hoped to pay his little visit to Castleford, and after that he was going

to meet and bring his mother and sister home, as it happened Sir Robert would be obliged to come over earlier to attend some important meetings in his own neighbourhood.

The day arrived for Edgar's last visit before he should come to take Edith away, and her face wore its brightest looks. Oh! what a happy future appeared stretched before her!

The hours went slowly on, and no Edgar came; and then a letter in the greatest haste, written at the last moment, to tell his dearest Edith that he was summoned to attend his mother without a moment's delay, as she had been taken suddenly and dangerously ill. This was a most unfortunate *contretemps*, but poor little Edith bore up bravely; she would not increase her lover's anxiety and distress by one word of complaint, and only sent a few lines of heartfelt sympathy for his mother's illness, and cheering words

of hope for himself—not a syllable of her own disappointment, only entreating him not to think of her, and only to consult what would conduce most to his mother's comfort and happiness.

"So he will not return before the time fixed for our marriage, even if Lady Mostyn gets better soon," said she, in answer to various conjectures as to the time of his return, and duration of his absence; adding—"Edgar must stay with his mother, for I am sure the sight of his dear face will do her more good than all the doctors, and I will not grudge him to her now she is so ill, for have I not a whole happy lifetime to spend with him?"

Edith was rewarded for her disinterested conduct by hearing that Edgar had arrived safely at his journey's end, and found his mother better. They were then in Rome, where they had wished to spend Easter. Lady Mostyn was charmed to have her son with her, and by his remaining he en-

abled Sir Robert to leave his wife as soon as all danger was over, and they all hoped, as soon as Lady Mostyn was well enough to bear the journey, that she would be able to return home in time to be present at the marriage, keeping her son with her till then. This letter was followed by others, announcing Lady Mostyn's satisfactory progress towards recovery, written chiefly by Edgar's sister.

Thus the weeks passed on, and Easter was at hand. The travelling party were expected early the following week, and everything was to be in readiness for the marriage taking place on Edith's birthday on the Thursday. Before that day came, however, Mr. Fielding received a hurried letter from Sir Robert, saying he was then starting for Italy, having received an unexpected summons, only stating that his presence was imperatively demanded on family affairs of the greatest importance, but not a clue given as to the nature of

the business which so urgently demanded his presence—whether it concerned his wife's health, or whether anything had befallen either of his daughters. The suspense seemed terrible until the anxious husband and father could reach his family; his only comfort was that Edgar was with them, and by diligent travelling night and day, he should very shortly be with them. This dispatch had been sent by private hand to Mr. Fielding, as the town of Castleford did not boast any telegraph office in those days.

Mr. Fielding, as was his custom, made no mystery of the letter he had received, and he and his wife and daughter discussed it together. Edith had turned deadly pale on the first reading, as she remarked with trembling lips that it might be Edgar who was ill, or might have met with some accident, and she added that the last few accounts of Lady Mostyn had been written by one of her daughters, who said on both

occasions that Edgar was out, and seemed much engaged.

"Then," observed Mr. Fielding, cheerily, "we have the satisfaction of knowing that he is not laid up, and so far is well, for no doubt he will write himself to us on the subject that has called his father away."

Edith made no further comment, but seemed to take a little comfort from her father's remark.

The days passed slowly, *very* slowly, away, with the load of suspense that lay heavy upon the home and hearts of the Fieldings.

"We cannot expect to hear again from Sir Robert for some days; no doubt Edgar will write, but perhaps not till he has seen his father, for the ill-tidings may concern one of his sisters—perhaps she may be bent on some imprudent match, and he may not like either to tell it or to conceal it from Edith," was the constant speech, with various modifications, of Mrs.

Fielding, when, day by day, came the dreary repetition of "no foreign letter to-day."

Easter day came—a bright, beautiful, joyous-looking day, full of Spring feelings, a resurrection-time of nature and humanity. No one attended Divine service from the Fieldings' house—they sat as if in quiet expectation of some unknown, unsuspected calamity; it might be death, or it might be disgrace to those who were, or were to be, so nearly and dearly connected with them. Easter Sunday, however, passed away in all the silent monotony of the preceding days to the expectant family. Then Easter Monday and Tuesday, happy holidays throughout the town, also went by without incident, and vanished into the abyss of the dead past.

Thursday was Edith's birthday, and the poor girl observed, "We *must* know something before then." It was not, however, until Friday came that the intolerable bur-

den of the wearing suspense was lifted. It was about the middle of that day that a railway cab drove up to the door of Mr. Fielding's house, and Sir Robert Mostyn descended from it. He came in with a heavy, halting step, looking white, and worn, and worried. He grasped both Mr. and Mrs. Fielding's hands with a lingering pressure, then turned to Edith, and taking her in his arms, kissed her very tenderly, saying only, "My poor child!" then replaced her on the sofa from which she had risen; but Edith sprang up again, and fixing her straining, eager eyes on his face, and laying both her poor trembling little hands, with a look of piteous entreaty, on his arm, whispered,

"Where is *he?*—why did not *he* come with you? Tell me at once—is he alive?"

Sir Robert passed his hand over his own eyes, and then took both the girl's hands in his, as he answered,

"Yes, my poor child, he is alive, but

perhaps it had been happy for you if he were not, and if he had never known you."

Then Sir Robert said, painful as it was, he had come to announce the sad fact to them himself that his son had forsaken his own Church and gone over to that of Rome. Then Edith gave a little cry of relief as she raised her head and eyes, and clasping her poor trembling hands with a gesture of entreaty, she exclaimed—

"Oh! Sir Robert, is *that* all? Then he lives, and he has done nothing really wrong? Tell me where he is, that I may write and comfort him, and tell him that, whatever others may think of the step he has taken, and if there are errors in his new faith, I am ready and willing to share them with him. Oh! when shall I see him again?—when will he come to me?"

"*Never*, my dear child. Nay, listen to me; sad and terrible as all this must be to you, and to me, his mother, and all of

us, we shall probably never see Edgar again, for he has vowed himself to the priesthood, so his life is to us closed for ever. I have not seen him, nor do I know where he is, though I have been travelling about to find him. His new friends have taken him away, far from all family influences, and this terrible wrong, my poor child, falls more heavily on you than on all of us. Oh! how could he do it—how could he forsake her?" the poor father exclaimed, as Edith sank heavily back on the sofa, and lay there in a long dreary trance of insensibility.

I need not pursue poor Edith's story much further; her engagement thus ended, she seemed to have no further care for life; her idol being cast down, and her cherished hopes destroyed, she was utterly desolate. No family ties or affections had any power to move her from the state of stony indifference into which she fell.

She heard once from Edgar Mostyn; he

wrote to her to bid her farewell for Time, but looking forward to a happier meeting, he said, in Eternity; he asked her to forgive any sorrow he might have caused her, but told her of the struggles that their engagement had cost him, and that he had fully intended to carry it out, hoping that peace would come afterwards, but when in Rome he met some old friends of the Catholic Church, and to them he confided his scruples, and was by them advised to seek safety and peace by entering the priesthood in their own persuasion. When he wrote, he had taken the vows of monastic life upon himself, and from that time we heard no more of him—he remained dead to his family and friends.

Edith never recovered from the blow she received that day; she never again entered into society. Dr. Grey was consulted, but he could not minister to a mind, or rather heart, diseased. She lived for two years after that miserable Easter, but a cold,

neglected at the beginning, carried her off after a short illness. Whether Edgar Mostyn ever heard of her early death, I know not, but it was a melancholy ending to poor "Edith's Engagement."

MR. AND MRS. FANSHAW.

MR. AND MRS. FANSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

IT is some years now since a young couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw, came amongst us, and took up their residence in Castleford. No one knew anything of their antecedents, for it was a casualty which had seemed to determine their choice of this town to live in. A slight railway accident happened very near this place, when several persons were much shaken, and still more dreadfully alarmed. Amongst the former it appeared that this Mrs. Fanshaw received a slight concussion from being thrown violently against the opposite seat, and was in con-

sequence too nervous and ill to continue her journey. Her husband was extremely alarmed about her, and Dr. Grey was summoned, who merely prescribed a few simple remedies, and recommended perfect quiet for a few days. Then, after he had, at Mr. Fanshaw's earnest request, repeated his visits on the next and following days, he said there was no further need for his attendance, only advising that the journey, wherever it might tend, should be postponed for a week or so, and to that suggestion both the invalid and her husband seemed perfectly inclined to listen.

Dr. Grey was much struck with the appearance and pleasing manner of the young lady, and suggested that I should go and see the invalid, who was evidently a lady in every sense of the word, saying that both she and her husband looked so very young that it would be a kindness on my part to see if I could be of any use to them in any way.

We were not particularly exclusive people in Castleford, and I saw no reason whatever against my complying with my husband's request, and should have been equally ready to do so had he represented the invalid as being less ladylike and interesting than he had done. I accordingly presented myself the next morning at the inn or hotel where, by Dr. Grey's advice, the young couple had taken up their abode.

I was a good deal struck, on entering, by the appearance of both husband and wife, for even as the lady lay listlessly back on the sofa, and the young man sat at some little distance reading by the window, I fancied they belonged to different grades of society. The young wife—quite a girl, apparently in her teens—was extremely pretty, and looked very refined; there was no mistaking that she was a lady at the first glance, whilst the young man, who was also very young, looked

rather awkward as I came in, and as if inclined to make a retreat. I observed he was tall and slight, of a very dark complexion, and with black hair and slight moustache, and something of a foreign air about him, and his dress was similar to that of a French peasant, although made of finer materials, yet he wore the dark blouse, confined with a leather belt round the waist, and wide loose trousers. His features were rather plain and coarse, but the expression of his countenance intelligent and honest. The one redeeming point about him was the smallness of his hands and feet, which seemed almost at variance with the rest of his *bourgeois* appearance.

Mrs. Fanshaw raised herself from her recumbent position as I came in, and thanked me for my visit, though rather shyly, yet in the prettiest way possible. She looked a perfectly English woman, or rather girl, herself, and decidedly belonged

to the upper classes. She was (though rather in *déshabillé*) beautifully dressed, and everything about her in the daintiest order. If she moved, her husband was at her side to arrange her cushions, or fetch her a stool, and do all and everything with the tenderest care. I observed she took all his attentions very kindly, but without any of the answering devotion I should have expected in so young a wife.

We entered easily and readily into conversation, the late accident and all attendant circumstances affording plenty of common ground for participating in it. The young man, meanwhile, kept in the background, and seemed unwilling to take any part in our discourse, nor did his young wife appear to consider it necessary to include him in our conversation. However, as I was desirous to see and hear a little more of the gentleman, as well as of the lady, I turned round, and pointedly addressed some remarks to him as well as

to his wife. Seeing I wished to talk to him also, he responded quietly to my advances, but having answered my remarks, relapsed into silence. I then remarked that he spoke with a French accent, though in tolerably correct English, and I also observed that he had an unpleasantly high-toned voice, which further decided my impression that the lovely lady had married some young foreigner beneath her in station, as he seemed to be in general appearance and manner.

On the whole, however, I was pleased with my new acquaintances, though I knew so little about them, and the young lady expressed herself much gratified with what she called my kind attention to her, and thanked me for offering to repeat my visit. I was glad to do so, for I was much interested in the invalid, and thought she must find it dull in a strange place, and no one to speak to except her husband, who did not appear to me to be at all a fitting

spouse for such an elegant and charming little wife.

Dr. Grey laughed at my romance, as he termed my fancies in regard to his patient and her husband, and said he had not bestowed much attention on the latter; he only observed that he seemed anxious about and devoted to his wife, and he thought her a particularly interesting little woman, but did not see anything very remarkable in the case of two young people, probably on their wedding excursion, being detained by an accident for a week or two at a quiet, out-of-the-world old town like Castleford; observing, also, that whether I was pleased to consider them suited to each other in station or in other ways, it was evident they entertained no such misgiving themselves, as they appeared always to be perfectly contented and well satisfied with each other, so he would advise me to dismiss all anxiety on that head. Dr. Grey further said his professional visits were at

an end, but he should call upon them now and then, when he had time, but supposed it would not be long now before they set out again on their interrupted journey.

This quickened my desire to see more of the (in different ways) interesting couple, who were still at the King's Head Hotel, and I also wished to persuade the charming little Mrs. Fanshaw to come and pass a day with me before she and her husband left Castleford.

To my surprise, on my mentioning the subject, the little lady said they had given up the idea of moving at present; they both liked Castleford very much, and thought, if they could find a small house to suit them, they should like to remain where they were for a few months. It was then Autumn, and the Winter was coming on, so they should at all events not care to move before the Spring.

Upon that announcement, I repressed all mention of my surprise, but expressed

my sincere satisfaction at the determination at which they had arrived. I ventured, however, to make some observation relating to the destination of the journey they were making when the railway accident threw them, as it were, amongst us. I saw Mrs. Fanshaw glance hastily at her husband, who then came forward and said, in his high-pitched, foreign tone of voice,

"Ah, yes, Madame is right; we were bound on a journey, but it had no special termination in view. We were making what you call honeymoon, and that can be enjoyed at one place as well as another." And having said thus, Mr. Fanshaw retreated to his favourite post of observation by the window.

The young lady looked up, and smiled and nodded at him; then, turning her attention to me, said,

"Yes, we have no settled home as yet; all our relatives are abroad, and we do not expect to see any of them again this

year, so, finding we like this place, we think of establishing ourselves in a very quiet way, if you will kindly help us to do so."

The help thus candidly asked for by these wandering lovers, as they appeared to be, was no pecuniary assistance—only the help of advising them where to look for the temporary abode they had fixed their hearts on finding at Castleford; indeed, I heard—for rumour on such interesting matters is ever rife in small places, especially in a country town, be it ever so isolated—and rumour was in all ways favourable to our new friends as regarded money concerns. It was said they seemed very well off (I knew no reason why they should not have been so), and they had plenty of luggage belonging to them, addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw, which found its way to them after the accident; so the people at the hotel, as well as society in

general, were satisfied that they were perfectly "respectable."

We had no difficulty in finding such a house as they wished for—they both objected to lodgings; it was not far from our own house, and though small, seemed to comprise all they wished for.

"We are not rich—at least, not at present," said Mrs. Fanshaw, in explanation to me, "but we have all we want, and we shall only require a quiet woman as a general servant, for," she added, with a smile, "we are not likely to be troubled with many visitors here."

I replied that *that* would depend on their own inclinations, as no doubt they could have in time as many visitors as they liked to entertain, if they were so disposed. Mrs. Fanshaw said nothing in answer to my remark, and everything regarding the new house, as well as the servant they required, was, by my recom-

mendation, soon settled. At the end of a week from the time their search commenced, our new neighbours took up their residence in their small habitation.

I believe, from the fact of Dr. Grey's professional attendance, and my following in his steps in visiting the newly-arrived couple, that Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw were looked upon as our special property, and Dr. Grey and myself as the natural sponsors as to the eligibility of their being admitted to all the pleasures and privileges of Castleford society; but, as I have said, we were not exclusive, and were ready to be pleased and satisfied when all looked fair and favourable, as it did in regard to the young and interesting couple.

It was soon discovered that Mrs. Fanshaw was a first-rate musician; she played and sang to perfection. Mr. Fanshaw appeared also to be a proficient on the guitar, and sang to it, in spite of his unpleasant speaking tones, in a rich contralto

voice, chiefly French songs—indeed, his nationality was so apparent that I could not help remarking upon it to his wife one day, when there appeared an opening to the subject. She started and coloured as she answered,

"Oh, no, indeed. Mr. Fanshaw is English—that is, he was born in England, and his father was an Englishman; but his mother is French, and after her husband's death she went abroad with her children, and has lived there chiefly since; and I also have been a good deal abroad, though I was educated and lived till lately in England."

That little history, I thought, fully accounted for Mr. Fanshaw's English name, and foreign tone and appearance. At the same time, I could not cease wondering what had induced this high-bred, delicately-nurtured, and accomplished English girl to cast in her lot with one apparently so unsuited to her as the young Anglo-French man.

The only solution that presented itself to my mind was their mutual love of music, and one well knows what strange matches that predilection has brought about. I looked, but looked in vain, for some explanation of the mystery, but Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw always appeared on the best of terms; there was certainly nothing demonstrative, and none of the love-making one might have expected from such a recently-wedded pair, neither was there ever, to all appearance, the slightest want of harmony between them, and to this the good woman who acted as their servant bore willing testimony.

She came to me one day on some slight matter of individual interest, and took the opportunity of thanking me for my recommendation, saying,

"There never was a nicer, pleasanter lady or kinder gentleman to live with, and to see his attention to his lady! for if even the least thing ailed her, he was up night

and day waiting on her, and always took up everything to her himself when she kept her room, and she did believe he waited on her and helped her with her dressing, and doing up her beautiful hair, when it seemed too much trouble to the lady to do it herself;" adding, "And you know, ma'am, that I myself am not any great hand in waiting on a lady, in the way of dress like."

I quite agreed with good, homely Mrs. Symonds, and could easily believe that a Frenchman's hands were more likely to meet the lady's requirements than her own rough, hard-worked, honest English ones.

I saw a great deal of Mrs. Fanshaw after they were settled in their new house, but very little of Mr. Fanshaw; he evidently avoided society, and never, except in a few instances, when Mrs. Fanshaw called on his help in a musical way, did he even join in any little society that she might chance to invite to her own house,

far less did he care to enter into any at other houses. However, Mrs. Fanshaw went very little from her own home; she came in her quiet way often to see and talk to me, and sometimes gave me a little music, which was indeed a treat. She was in great request on that account on all musical *réunions* in our little society. She went to some, but, it seemed to me, more out of kindness and good-nature to please others than for any satisfaction arising to herself or pleasure in the performances.

It was at one of these little concerts that I overheard a few words from her which added to my surprise, and rather deepened the mystery that I felt attached to her married life.

It was an answer she made to an irrepressible lady who was offended at Mr. Fanshaw's non-appearance at her concert, and the loss of his expected musical assistance, that she presumed on his wife's silence, whilst she held forth on the sub-

ject *des appointements* and consequent annoyance, and then proceeded to condole with her on his unsuitability in various ways to herself, ending by observing she was sure it must have been against her parents' wish that she had so bestowed herself.

Mrs. Fanshaw's answer came calm and clear as she looked steadily in the face of her inquisitor, and the words were—

"You are quite mistaken; neither father nor mother, nor any friend I have in the world, ever objected to my marrying Mr. Fanshaw, and we *are* perfectly happy."

There was no appearance of anger or excitement in her voice or manner as she said this and turned from the incensed lady, and taking up a piece of music with a smile observed she would endeavour to supply her husband's place and sing the song expected from him.

CHAPTER II.

TIME passed away; the Winter was gone, and Spring came by slow degrees. Still Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw made no mention of departure. Our intimacy had increased, and by that time Mrs. Fanshaw had entreated that I would drop her formal name, and call her only by her Christian one, which she told me was "Dora." I had never heard it before, for Mr. Fanshaw, when speaking to his wife, neither addressed her by any name nor even title of endearment—at least, he had never done so when I chanced to be present. I was equally in the dark as to his name, as whenever his wife spoke to him it was always as "*Mon ami;*" nevertheless, nothing

ever appeared to disturb the harmony which subsisted between them.

When I asked Dora (it was pleasant to call her so, and somehow seemed more natural than "Mrs. Fanshaw") if they had settled to take their house for an indefinite time, as some one had mentioned such an intention on their part.

"Yes," she answered, "for an indefinite time;" adding, "You perhaps wonder that we should be so unsettled, but the fact is, until I am of age, which will not be just yet, my plans must be to a certain degree unsettled."

I observed she only mentioned herself, which confirmed me in my suspicion that she ruled her husband entirely. He certainly appeared to have no will but hers—at least, if he had, it was never asserted.

There was another family besides our own with whom Mrs. Fanshaw lived on terms of considerable intimacy, and who also wished to include her husband (but

ford by the same train, and in the same carriage as the Fanshaws. The sudden shock that had affected Mrs. Fanshaw had an equally injurious effect upon Henry Middleton, and he had been indebted to Mr. Fanshaw for timely and kind assistance, who, after he had extricated his wife, had turned his attention to their fellow-passenger, as he was rendered almost insensible by the concussion.

It was some time after the accident had happened that Henry Middleton became aware to whom he was indebted; but after (I believe through Dr. Grey) he and his family knew that it was Mr. Fanshaw who had so kindly succoured him, they were all very unanimous in their expression of gratitude, and from that time it came to pass that Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw were in the habit of receiving constant and friendly attention from all the Middleton family. How this was responded to at first I can hardly say, but by degrees Dora Fanshaw was

beguiled into more intimate acquaintance with her new friends than, it seems, she had intended. For she said it was very different with two quiet, middle-aged people like Dr. Grey and myself, to be on intimate terms, and come and go to their house at all times; but in such a family as Mr. Middleton's, with young people, it involved so much more than she was prepared for, or that suited "Mr. Fanshaw's retiring habits." Still the intimacy steadily progressed. No one that had seen much of Dora Fanshaw could resist wishing to improve the acquaintance, and desiring to see more of her. She yielded at last, but, as it were, under protest, and as the year advanced the intimacy ripened.

Henry Middleton was in every way desirous to include his benefactor, Mr. Fanshaw, in their constant meetings and musical *réunions*, but to all the most friendly overtures he remained for the most part insensible, seldom appearing at the Middle-

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tons' house, except to escort his wife home, and then barely remaining longer than a few seconds, unless he yielded to Millicent's entreaties that he would just stay and play one little air on the guitar to her, or show her how to finger a difficult passage, though Dora was always ready to help her in any musical perplexities. Millicent, however, played well on the piano, though her performance was, like herself, devoid of taste and expression, and the result of hard practice.

Henry Middleton, on the contrary, had a great deal of taste and natural genius, as well as liking for music, but little cultivation; but of late, since his acquaintance with the Fanshaws, he appeared desirous of improving and exercising such talent as he possessed. Hence it was that he appeared to seek every opportunity of meeting his new and interesting friends, and for a time his sister gladly facilitated his wishes, as they tended very much to the

gratification of her own, in trying to improve their acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw. But, as I have said, they were far more successful with Dora than with her husband.

About that time, however (in the Autumn of the year), a fresh interest suddenly presented itself to Mr. Fanshaw, and for the time being he appeared perfectly devoted to its enjoyment. This dated from the arrival of a company of provincial actors at our little theatre in Castleford, when their performances appeared to afford him unfailing amusement. They made their annual visit generally about the same time, remaining a few weeks, varying according to the encouragement they received. They were a very fair troupe for country performers, and had their regular appointments in various country towns, observing their usual time of going and coming with great punctuality.

As soon as they were fairly established in their old quarters at Castleford, it was remarked that their most constant patron was Mr. Fanshaw. Hardly a night came that he did not make his appearance in the theatre, always in the same place, seated in the dark at the back of the box, and apparently absorbed in the interest and enjoyment of the performance.

I felt rather glad to hear that the poor man had found something to amuse him, for, music apart, I fancied that he and his wife had not many common sources of enjoyment, as it always seemed to me that they must have moved in different orbits of society before they had, for some unaccountable reason, agreed to unite their fates.

It happened, one morning, that Dora Fanshaw dropped in alone, as she was in the habit of doing, when I asked her if she was as fond of going to the play as I understood Mr. Fanshaw appeared

to be. She laughed as she answered,

"Oh, no! *Mon ami* has a perfect passion for the theatre, but I cannot say I partake in the fancy. A good play now and then is very well, but to sit night after night looking at, and listening to these country actors I must say passes my powers of endurance."

"I almost wonder, then," I replied, "that Mr. Fanshaw can so kindly condescend to patronise them, and with all his proficiency in and great musical talent. I think his patience must be sorely taxed."

"I should think so too," she answered, with a smile; "but the theatre has an irresistible charm for him—a bad performance is better than none—and then it is a little change from the sameness of our quiet 'evenings at home.'"

"But that is his own choice," I ventured to remark. "Mr. Fanshaw might vary his evenings as much as he pleased by

passing some of them with you at your friends' houses, and the chances are he would hear some better music than what passes for such at Castleford Theatre."

"I am sure he would," said Mrs. Fanshaw; "but you must excuse his apparent insensibility to all your, and other friends' kindness. You know we are only birds of passage, and perhaps it is wiser not to cultivate pleasant acquaintances that we must in all probability take leave of ere long."

This was said with a kind of hesitation, as if it was necessary in some way to account for their manifest reluctance to enter into such society as was open to them in Castleford. I was beginning to say something about my hope that an acquaintance so happily begun and continued for the space of a whole year, would not be utterly dissolved even when the time came for changing their residence, but had not proceeded far in my observations when

the servant opened the door and announced "Mr. Henry Middleton."

Now I had known that gentleman and also his sister from their infancy, and their father and mother before them, but I had never been in the habit of receiving such constant calls from Mr. Henry Middleton as of late it had been his good pleasure to make at my house. I cannot say I felt greatly flattered, or even gratified by that circumstance. I liked the young man, but he had never been particularly intimate at our house, so it was but natural that I should seek some other cause than individual friendship for these repeated calls.

On the present occasion I had not far to seek, and it was with extreme concern that I observed the quick flush and the glad light that spread itself over Mrs. Fanshaw's fair face; whilst I also noted with something like pain the expression of eager pleasure on Henry Middleton's countenance, and the devoted *empressement*

of his whole manner towards her. I felt annoyed with him, and provoked with Dora, and yet I pitied her—for what, thought I, can be the result of such an apparently ill-assorted marriage as she has had the folly to make? At the same time, I felt determined that Mr. Henry Middleton should not make my house a place of rendezvous. I had, of course, nothing to do with his home acquaintances, and only felt sorry that there there would be no barrier to the growth of his intimacy with Mrs. Fanshaw. Yet, perhaps I might have an opportunity of dropping a word in season, which might do good on Dora's part, but it would be very difficult to do so, I felt, without giving offence, or, it might be, of confirming an impression of which she might hardly be aware herself at that time.

The two young people soon became very much engrossed in talking together, and I had no opportunity of saying anything,

though I should not have thought of doing so whilst Henry Middleton remained. They both asked my permission to open the piano, and try a song together. I could not refuse the leave which, under other circumstances, I should have been but too happy to grant, for their duet gave me almost as much satisfaction in a musical point of view as it did themselves.'

I had never seen Dora look so perfectly happy; no sense of future ill seemed to alarm her. They turned over song after song, laughing and chattering merrily between each. At last she turned to me and exclaimed—

"You are sure we do not tire you? But I know, dear Mrs. Grey, how fond you are of music, and your piano suits the voice so well; it is so much pleasanter to sing to than the one we have hired from the library."

I could not help putting that little speech into other words, not *spoken*, but

felt, which were, how much pleasanter she found it to sing with her present companion than with the one at home. I feared, indeed, it was so—but what could I do?

Whilst I was thus musing, I was very thankful to see the door open again, and to hear the name of Mr. Fanshaw announced. I glanced uneasily towards the piano, where Mrs. Fanshaw was so happily engaged, and where the young man by her side was apparently unmindful of everything but the intense enjoyment of the present hour. Mr. Fanshaw came in with his rather awkward walk, and twirling his hat in his hand, said abruptly to his wife, after bowing to me,

"I thought it was getting late, and that you would want me to walk home with you." And then, seeing the lady's occupation, he added—"But if you do not want me, I will go. I can come again?"

The last words were spoken inquiringly as his eye fell on Mr. Henry Middleton so

happily seated by his wife, and I looked inquiringly also to see the mood in which they were uttered, and also looked at Dora to note the effect produced by her husband's entrance. There was certainly no embarrassment that I could trace; she only coloured slightly, and looked up in his face with something of a conscious smile, but perfect cordiality, and as if not displeased at the interruption; and then *he*, the husband? I saw him return the smile with another of perfect satisfaction and good humour, as if he were really sorry to interrupt the pleasant *tête-à-tête* between his wife and Mr. Middleton; but she rose immediately from the piano, saying,

"You are right, *mon ami*, it *is* late, and I am ready to depart with thee. I have had a charming musical hour, thanks to my kind friend, Mrs. Grey," and then, looking a little shyly towards her late companion, she added, "and Mr. Middleton."

That gentleman also got up quickly, saying,

"All the obligation, I am sure, is on my part, for I am but a novice, and you, Mrs. Fanshaw, such a proficient. Oh, do come and try these songs again at our house to-morrow morning."

I thought Mrs. Fanshaw looked nothing loth to accept the invitation, but she hesitated, when her husband hastened to her rescue, exclaiming—

"Oh, do go; you must give him the encore he supplicates—you ought to have that complaisance."

"Then I shall expect you both?" said the young man.

Mr. and Mrs. Fanshaw only bowed and went away.

"What a strange pair!" thought I.

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